

# **LIFE ON THE RED ROCK RANCH, 1904-1965: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE A. DICKINSON**

Interviewee: Lawrence A. Dickinson

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## **Description**

Meadows along the western edge of the Great Basin have been grazed by cattle ever since the first emigrant wagons pushed through in the 1840s. By 1850 permanent ranching operations existed, and today more than 80 percent of all agricultural land in Nevada is used to support cattle. From the earliest days ranching life has been viewed both as a major source and as one of the clearest expressions of the values and cultural identity of the state.

With the discovery first of gold and then of silver on the Comstock in 1859, ranching in west-central Nevada expanded to supply beef and dairy products for the booming mining communities. The Red Rock ranch in Washoe County was one of those that prospered, and it has remained in the same family ever since. Sophus Petersen, a Danish immigrant, bought the ranch in 1851 from a family which had homesteaded the land. In this 1985 interview, Lawrence Dickinson, Petersen's grandson, and the current owner of the Red Rock ranch, remembers family and ranch history.

Mr. Dickinson's oral history covers many topics important to understanding the social and economic history of ranching in Washoe County. As an intelligent observer or participant in events covering more than three quarters of a century of changing conditions, Mr. Dickinson's recollections are clear and insightful. This oral history is a useful addition to the primary source record of a way of life that has not been well documented in Nevada.

For a treatment of a woman's role in Nevada ranching, and a discussion of Red Rock ranch history from a woman's perspective, see *Life on the Red Rock Ranch, 1931-1965: An Interview with Judie Dickinson*.



**LIFE ON THE RED ROCK RANCH, 1904-1965:  
AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE A. DICKINSON**

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# **LIFE ON THE RED ROCK RANCH, 1904-1965: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE A. DICKINSON**

An Oral History Conducted by N. J. Broughton

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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## PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber  
Director, UNOHP  
July 2012

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## ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as

possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable.

When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

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Mailstop 0324  
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## INTRODUCTION

Meadows along the western edge of the Great Basin have been grazed by cattle ever since the first emigrant wagons pushed through in the 1840s. By 1850 permanent ranching operations existed, and today more than 80 percent of all agricultural land in Nevada is used to support cattle. From the earliest days ranching life has been viewed both as a major source and as one of the clearest expressions of the values and cultural identity of the state.

With the discovery first of gold and then of silver on the Comstock in 1859, ranching in west-central Nevada expanded to supply beef and dairy products for the booming mining communities. The Red Rock ranch in Washoe County was one of those that prospered, and it has remained in the same family ever since. Sophus Petersen, a Danish immigrant, bought the ranch in 1851 from a family which had homesteaded the land. In this 1985 interview, Lawrence Dickinson, Petersen's grandson and the current owner of Red Rock ranch, remembers family and ranch history.

Under the guidance of interviewer Nancy Broughton, Mr. Dickinson's oral history covers many topics important to understanding the social and economic history of ranching in Washoe County. As an intelligent observer or participant in events covering more than three quarters of a century of changing conditions, Mr. Dickinson's recollections are clear and insightful. This oral history is a useful addition to the primary source record of a way of life that has not been well documented in Nevada.

For a treatment of a representative woman's role in Nevada ranching, and a discussion of Red Rock ranch history from a woman's perspective, please see the Judie Dickinson oral history. Readers interested in other oral histories dealing with the ranching experience in Nevada are directed to the Oral History Program's Master Index.

R. T. King  
December, 1986





LAWRENCE A. DICKINSON  
1986





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## LIFE ON THE RED ROCK RANCH, 1904-1965: AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE A. DICKINSON

*R.T. King: Where is the Red Rock ranch located?*

Lawrence A Dickinson: The Red Rock ranch is about 30 miles north of Reno, by the Red Rock Road. It's about 40 miles around the other way by the highway and come in the north end.

*In other words, go up 395 and come back in from the Doyle side?*

Right.

*Describe the ranch for me. How many acres existed there when you lived there? What's the geography like? Was there water on the ranch?*

The fact is, it was a fairly small ranch to start with, say, maybe 400 acres. Then there was an old guy by the name of Kietzke. He was a miner, and after my folks bought it from the Pierson boy, why, he came out there and dug this tunnel. This tunnel is in the mountain, and there was a bunch of springs right along the mountain. So they conceived the idea that

they could go in under and get all the water coming out in one place. So he came out and he put a tunnel in there. The tunnel is in 680 feet, and then there's, I think, 80 feet of 6-inch pipe through the dirt till they got back in kind of a solid granite—so it could never cave in and quit running. There's about a half, maybe three quarters, of a 6-inch pipe of water coming out of there. And as far as I know, it's always been just about the same—wet years or dry years—because it's deep.

*That was the water supply for the ranch?*

That was the water supply for the meadow.

*That wasn't your domestic water supply for the house?*

No. We had a small spring—it was just in above the house—that we fixed up that gave us enough water for the house.

*Did you have to go outside to get the water or did you have the water piped into the house at all?*

Well, since I can remember we've had the water piped in the house.

*How long has your family owned the Red Rock ranch?*

Let's see. It was in my family for 115 years when we sold it in 1966.

*Who was the first person in your family to have the ranch?*

That was Grandad Petersen.. .Sophus Petersen. He came over here from Denmark and bought the ranch from the Pierson boy. I guess I didn't tell you that—the Pierson boy was the only one that survived. They [Pierson family] were the first to own the ranch, and they used to come in there with their dairy in the summertime when the meadow was green. There was always water, a spring there that kept this small meadow going, and they'd come in there and dairy and make cheese. Then they'd go back in the wintertime—because they didn't put up hay—and take the dairy back to Standish, [California]. They were all killed when they went back, but this little boy ran in the tules and got away from the Indians.

My granddad Petersen came across the Plains and came in here and bought it. He was the youngest landowner in the state of Nevada—the boy—at that time, and Granddad Petersen bought it from him. Then he went out there and settled on the ranch, and the Indians would come there. There used to be the words gee-whoa-haw. That was when they were driving the mules and teams. Gee-whoa-haw meant go [to the Indians], and the Indians would come in, and they'd say, "Gee-whoa-haw Truckee Meadows." so he'd get up and go, because he didn't want to get killed, of course.

*Do you know when the Pierson family first took over the ranch? Did they homestead it?*

Yes, I guess they homesteaded it [1850]

*They came in when the meadow was green, like in the spring or the summer, and set up their dairy and then went back to Standish. They didn't live on the ranch?*

They stayed there summers. Yes, they camped there. In the summer.

*They lived in Standish?*

That's near Susanville. That's their permanent home.

*These dairies...did a lot of people do that, move their cows into meadows?*

Yes, they did that to some extent in Last Chance, [California], too.

*Now, where's Last Chance?*

Well, that's up in the mountains where you see that lake—Frenchman's. It was just up over the hill from Chilcoot Junction. Just as you go over the hill, and then you go back in the mountain that's where Last Chance Creek was.

The Galeppi brothers had been long-time ranchers there, and they did that. They used to go in the mountains, and then in the deep snow they'd come out, see, and they'd take their dairy with them.

*The meadow grass was the summer feed, and then you didn't cut hay?*

They didn't cut hay, no, in there. They cut hay on their home ranch.

*Did the Piersons have a house up there on the ranch when they were coming in the summertime with their dairy herd?*

Yes, they had a small house and a wagon, I think.

*Do you know why your grandfather Petersen came here? Where did he come from?*

He came from Denmark, and he just came here like the other old-timers, I guess. They just wanted to homestead and get out of civilization, just like everybody wanted to come west.

*Do you know why he left Denmark? Were there political troubles or family troubles back there?*

No, I never heard of any trouble. He just wanted to branch out.

*Were there a lot of Danes coming into this area at that time?*

Yes. They came from different countries and settled in different places here. Out in Minden, they were all Germans and in Reno here they were all Italians. I don't say all, but [there] was a settlement here [that] was Italian. My grandfather wasn't Italian, of course. He was from Denmark. But those old-timers just wanted to branch out and see the country.

*Now, when Sophus left Denmark, did he come directly to Nevada, or did he stop someplace in between?*

Oh, he stopped in New York, I think, and spent some time there, and then I think he had a partner to come out with.

*Do you know what he did in New York while he was there or how long he stayed there before he came west?*

No, I really don't.

*How did he and his partner come here?*

They came across the Plains with a wagon train.

*Do you know about what year that was?*

Well, let's see. That had to be about probably about 1848.

*Do you know why he settled in Nevada?*

No, I've often wondered sometimes. [laughter]

*Yes. [laughter] It seems like so many were moving on to greener pastures, so to speak, and up there it's not all that green all the time.*

Yes. Well, that's a funny thing, I've always thought. He came right across the Truckee Meadows; he could have had anything here. There was nothing here at that time. And at that time the valley was flooded pretty near every winter, because there was a lot more water, and then there was not the amount of water used, either. So the reef and the river was down there, and it used to flood the meadows and it was tule—kind of tule hay, see? And so the hay didn't look any good to him, and he wanted to get out in the country, so....

*He kept on going.*

Yes. I've often wondered.

*Did he know that that had been a ranch at the time, or do you know if he just came upon this meadow and this valley?*

He and his partner, I think, went out there; I guess somebody told them about it. They took a team and went out there, and it looked good to him, I guess. It is a beautiful spot.

*Do you know when Sophus was born? About how old was he when he was doing all this here?*

[Eighteen thirty-two.]

*How large of an area did Sophus get? Did he buy it or did he apply for homestead on it?*

[He] bought [500 acres] from the Pierson boy.

*Do you know if his partner applied for any at that time?*

No, he didn't. They just kind of fell apart, I guess.

*Who was his partner? Do you know his name?*

I don't know his name, no.

*What did Sophus do on the ranch? Did he have dairy cattle there?*

No, he had regular beef cattle.

*Had he been a farmer back in Denmark?*

I think he was.

*Do you know how many head of beef cattle he ran?*

Probably 50 or 100.

*Do you know where he would have gotten his first herd?*

I imagine he just kind of built it up from starting with just a few.

*Would he have bought a few head from neighbors...*

Yes.

*...or other established ranchers, because there were some ranchers established around the Truckee Meadows area at that time. Do you know what kind of cattle he had at that time?*

He had Hereford.

*And Sophus lived on the property all year long? He didn't move off in the wintertime like the Piersons had?*

No, after he got settled there and finally the Indians let him alone.... The government made a survey, and by that time the Indians had respect for surveys, see. When they came the last time to tell him to leave, why, he took them up and showed them the stake. He said he knew right where that stake was, but he said he hunted for about 3 hours before he found it! [laughter] When he showed them the stake, why, the Indians left, and they never came back after that.

*But before that they had come back like once a year and had told him to leave?*

They'd come back oftener than that, about every 6 months. He didn't really establish his home there until after they let him alone.

*Now, when he left at their request, did he take his cattle and everything and move off?*

No, I don't think he took his cattle.

*Did the Indians bother the cattle at all? Did they kill the cattle?*

Not that I know of. They never tried to bother the cattle.

*This would have been the federal government which made the survey finally?*

Yes.

*Do you know what year that was?*

Well, it...[about 1858].

*So then after the survey, Sophus ended up staying and didn't have too much trouble with the Indians?*

That's right.

*Did the Indians ever threaten him to kill him?*

That's right. They did.

*Did Sophus ever get married?*

Yes, he finally went in partners with [Martin] Mortensen, and they [Martin and Sophia] came out and helped him run the ranch. They lived in Verdi.

*They were in Verdi at the time?*

Yes. He was from Denmark.

*So there were several Danish families in the area?*

Yes.

*Then your grandpa Petersen went into partnership with Mr. Mortensen?*

Yes, and they had the cattle there together.

*And Mr. Mortensen came up to live on the ranch?*

Yes.

*When Sophus Petersen went into partnership with Mr. Mortensen, was Petersen married at that time?*

Yes, he [had been].

*Did his wife come from Denmark, also?*

Yes, she did.

*Do you remember her name?*

No, I don't remember her name. She passed away— died in childbirth—before I was even born, of course.

*How many children did Sophus and his wife have?*

Well, Sophus and his first wife had this little boy and one little girl. She died in childbirth [with the third child], and Sophus was left with these 2 kids to raise. So he stayed there for a while, and then he thought that things kind of quieted down, and his partner at that time— Mortensen—said they'd take care of the ranch, and he'd go back to Denmark. Mortensen told him, "Well, when you're back there," he said, "look my sister up, and tell her where we're at and how we're doing out here."

So he did, and this is where Grandma Petersen came in. He looked her up, and he ended up marrying her and bringing her back.

*How old was she? Do you know when they got married?*

Well, she was pretty young.

*Was she a lot younger than he was?*

I think they were pretty close to the same age.

*Did Sophus get married right away after his first wife died, or was there a considerable lapse of time there?*

There was a little lapse of time.

*Why did he wait? Were there no women around here, or was he just not sure that he wanted to remarry?*

No, there was no women here. He said that women were far and few between! [laughter]

*Did he not want to get married, maybe, and then decided he should for the children?*

Well, I, of course, don't know that part, but I think he wanted a wife because he had these 2 small children to take care of, too. I don't think he actually went back [to Denmark] for that purpose, but he met her back there when he went to see her. She was going to finishing school, so she was probably, oh, around 17 or something in there.

*What was her name?*

Krestine. That's Danish.

*How long were they on the ranch then, together? Did they have any children?*

Yes, they had my mother and 2 other sisters—Clara and Sophie. My mother's name was Hattie; Hattie is English for Hedvig.

*You mentioned earlier, off the tape, that your grandpa Petersen was killed in an accident.*

He went out to feed a bunch of cattle in one of these hay wagons that we used to feed the hay out in—loose hay. It was in a big wind, and the wind got under the bed and blew it off the wheels and he was [pinned] under it. He evidently was injured inside internally, and he lived, oh, maybe 10 days. I guess if it had been today they could have operated and saved him, but he just hemorrhaged and died from internal injuries.

*Was he still partnering with Mortensen at that time?*

No. Mortensen had moved to Verdi.

*Now, when he came back from Denmark with Krestine, did they live on the ranch, the 2 couples? Mortensen was married?*

Yes. They lived there for a little while. Then his wife and Krestine weren't getting along too good. She was kind of a funny old gal, Mortensen. So they decided to buy this ranch in Verdi, and they split the blankets, divided the cattle, and took a different iron. You see, they had [the] same earmark only it was in the opposite ears. Our earmark from my family was slit in the left and oversloped in the right, and the earmark that they used was slit in the right and oversloped in the left.

*Now, when you mention earmarks—for the tape—what are you talking about?*



That's the identification for cattle other than a branding iron.

*Did you use earmarks and brands at the same time on the same cattle?*

That's right.

*Were earmarks done when the cattle were young?*

Yes, when they were calves about 3 months old, I'd say.

*Why did you use both an earmark and a brand?*

Well, for identification, in case the iron didn't show up. And then you could tell them at a distance better, too.

*When you say a slit in the left and an overslope on the right, can you describe what a slit is and describe what an overslope is?*

Well, a slit—you put your knife in the ear and just slit right up the middle. The overslope you take and just cut a piece out of the top.

*Like notch the top of the ear?*

Not notch it, no.

*Just cut it right off?*

In and out, yes. Take about a third of the ear off.

*What brand did you use?*

We used a reversed T heart—that one [see printed oral history for diagram of brand]. That's the same brand as Sophus Petersen was using.

*Does that have any significance to it, the reverse T heart?*

I don't know exactly how they arrived at it, but it was a good clean iron, a lot of irons blotch.

*Then when Mortensen left, Mortensen developed a different brand?*

Yes, he took a quarter circle M. That's for Mortensen, see.

*Were brands being registered back then with the state of Nevada?*

Yes.

*Did a rancher have to pay for that registration and the use of it, or how was that regulated?*

Yes, he paid. I don't remember at that time just how much it was, but now I think it's around \$50 to register an iron.

*Is that a one-time fee or yearly?*

I think it's every 3 years.

*And the brand is necessary for identification?*

Very necessary.

*After Sophus Petersen died, what did Krestine do? Did she continue to run the ranch?*

Well, she went and got my dad—who was born and raised on the Winnemucca ranch—and got him to come over and run the ranch for her. So he ended up marrying my mother. That's where the Dickinson name came an. He married Hattie.

*Let's talk about the Winnemucca ranch. Where was that in relation to Red Rock ranch?*

Well, it's just east. It may be a little bit north-northeast, but it's only about 18 miles through the hills.

*How long had the Winnemucca ranch been established?*

That was established about the same time as Red Rock.

*Had the Dickinsons always owned it?*

Yes, the Dickinsons took that up as a homestead.

*What was your father's father's name? It wasn't your father who took it up because he would have been a young man.*

That's right. His [the father's] name was Tule Frank; his name was Frank Dickinson, is what it was.

*He was the original owner of the Winnemucca ranch?*

Yes. He had a partner there for a while. His name was Manns.

*Where was the Dickinson family from?*

He's from England.

*Do you know when or why he left England?*

No, I really don't know. But his family just wanted to get out of the country, I guess. Something new, some new place to get out and see. He was a young boy.

*Was his father a farmer in England?*

I think he was, yes.

*And then do you know if they came directly to Nevada after coming to the United States?*

No, [they] lived back in Decatur, Illinois. He owned practically where the town of Decatur is now—his ranch.

*So he had a farm there in Illinois?*

Yes.

*What caused him to leave Illinois and come further west?*

He just had that lust, I guess.

*Well, it was happening at that time in the 1850s and 1860s; they were moving west.*

Before he went out to Winnemucca ranch, he settled in Genoa. The fact is he had that ranch that was covered up with sand, in Franktown. It was just this side of Bowers Mansion.

*So then Frank Dickinson lived in Genoa?*

That's where he met Geneva Ermina Chapman.

*And how old was Frank when he got married?*

He was about 35, I guess, and she was younger.

*Now, with a name like Chapman, was she from England, also?*

Yes. She was from England, too. She came over here with her parents and lived in Genoa, I think.

*How did the 2 of them meet, then?*



I don't just recall just how they did meet. She was living in Genoa, and her parents were moving to Sacramento.

*Was he farming or ranching in Genoa?*

Yes, he had a ranch there, where this Slide Mountain was.

*He had a ranch in Washoe Valley?*

Yes. They got married in Genoa.

*And then he moved from Washoe Valley to Winnemucca ranch?*

Yes. That's just over the hill from Pyramid Lake.

*There weren't a whole lot of people up there at that time, though, compared to, say, Franktown and Washoe Valley. How did your grandmother Dickinson feel about that move to the Winnemucca ranch?*

Well, she didn't stay there all the time. Every winter, she'd go to Sacramento and send the kids to school.

*And then come back in the summertime?*

Yes. She had relatives down there; her family lived there.

*Do you know what her father did in Sacramento?*

No, I really don't.

*How many children did the Dickinsons have?*

There was 3 boys and one girl. They had 2 that died.

*Do you know the names of the surviving children?*

It was Ben and Eastman, and Chapman was my dad, and Claire was the girl.

*Now, your father got asked by Sophus Petersen's widow, Krestine, to come help her work the ranch. They were neighbors, and did they do much socializing back and forth before this?*

I don't think very much, no. That's quite a little distance in those days; it was horseback or...

*Yes, 18 miles takes a while to go.*

Well, it was longer than that around by the road, too.

*After Chapman and Hattie got married, did Krestine stay on the ranch?*

Yes. They all lived in the same house.

*When was the ranch house built?*

At first the Mortensens lived in a different house. They had 2 houses. One was an old stone house—it was laid up with clay, in fact; they didn't even have cement—and the Mortensens lived in there. After my grandmother Petersen— Krestine—came there, why, she lived in that old house and the Mortensen people lived in the better house.

*Then after Hattie and Chapman were married, did they all lived in the larger house?*

Yes.

*Do you have any remembrances of your grandfather Petersen? What did he look like? What kind of a man was he?*

He was fairly short, a Dane—kind of husky, and he had a moustache and beard. I don't remember him—except the pictures—too well.

*So you just saw him from pictures, then?*

Yes.

*What about your grandmother Krestine? Do you remember her?*

Yes.

*What did she look like?*

Well, she was a little short Dane...dainty. A wonderful woman, really, always smiling.

*What about your grandmother and grandfather Dickinson? Can you describe them for me at all? Did you know either of them personally?*

Yes, I did. I grew up there. Later years, they sold the Winnemucca ranch and then they moved to Reno for a while. Then my dad built a house out there on a little ranch that's close to Red Rock ranch and moved them into this little house. As I was a kid then, we used to go back and forth to see Grandma and Grandad; it was about a mile and a half from our home where we lived.

*What did they look like? Let's talk about your grandfather Frank first.*

Well, he had a big white moustache and heavy white beard, and he was quite a storyteller.

*You mentioned earlier that he was called Tule Frank.*

Well, he arrived by that name when he first came here, and this was before he even moved

up into Genoa. He used to team hay from here into Virginia City, and they used to tell a story that it was pretty rough hay, because it was tule hay. So he'd tie his team up outside of Virginia City and walk in and find out which was the highest—wood or hay. That's what he went in to sell. These are the stories they told about him.

*What about your grandmother Dickinson? What was she like?*

She was a great big woman and pretty hard to get along with.

*Did you like her when you were little?*

No, I didn't like her. [laughter]

*When were you born?*

I was born in 1904.

*When were your parents married?*

They were married in 1900.

*Did you have any brothers and sisters?*

I have a sister, yes. Her name is Frances. She was born in 1901; she's 3 years older.

*When did your grandma Petersen die?*

She died in 1940. [Sophus Petersen died in 1898.]

*When did Grandma Dickinson die?*

Nineteen thirty-nine.

*What about Grandpa Dickinson?*

Well, I think he died about 1920.

*When Grandpa Petersen died, where was he buried? Were there cemeteries on the ranch then, or was there a cemetery on the Red Rock ranch?*

They're buried up here at Mountain View Cemetery. He died in Reno on Sixth and Sierra Street in Ben and Mamie's [Dickinson] home.

*Mountain View was established then?*

That was established.

*Do you know why he wasn't buried on the ranch?*

No, they didn't bury that way. They didn't believe in it at that time, just burying. There was nobody buried on the Petersen ranch, but these 2 girls were buried over on the Winnemucca ranch.

*At that time it was convenient enough for the ranch families to come into town and have it done in a town cemetery?*

Yes. They have 2 plots up there; there's the Dickinson plot and the Petersen plot. They're all there together.

*Were you born on the Red Rock ranch?*

I was born in Reno, really, on Second Street, between Washington and Vine.

*How did you come to be born in Reno and not on the ranch?*

Well, I guess my mother came in here and wanted to be in close to doctors. I can't remember just exactly who the house belonged to that I was born in. I think it was friends.

*What about your sister? Was she born in town also?*

Yes.

*But your parents were born on the ranches?*

Yes.

*What do you remember about your parents? Can you describe them for me?*

Well, my dad was a big man—very big—and a hearty man. As I remember, as I was growing up he never had a sick day. He was just a big muscular man who didn't care much about going anyplace; he just liked to stay home. My mother was more the other way; she liked to go out and see things, but my dad just liked the ranch—to stay there and work. He was a hard worker.

*Did that present any conflicts for them with her wanting to go more?*

Yes, I think it.... My mother was a real hard worker, too. She stayed there with him, but she liked to go better.

*Was she more apt to give up work if it meant she could, maybe, and let the work sit?*

I think so.

*And your father wasn't quite of that persuasion?*

That's right. He wouldn't let the work slip. In other words, if he thought he could get out of going, why, he would. But if the pressure was put too much, he would take her and go.

*What religion were your parents?*

They were Protestant, I think Lutheran.

*Were you children raised as Lutheran?*

Yes.

*Did you have weekly access to a church when you were growing up? Or was that occasional?*

Not too much. I didn't have too much church.

*So any values like that which you got your parents taught you?*

Yes. They taught me a little religion, but I didn't have much religion.

*Has that ever bothered you?*

No. I just figured that I lived by the golden rule.

*Did your mother enjoy living out on the ranch? Was that a hardship for her?*

I don't think so. She had her family, and she didn't know anything different. She used to get out and ride with us on the range.

*And her little jaunts to travel wherever when she could talk your father into it—those were enough to keep her satisfied?*

Yes. We used to go to San Francisco a couple of times a year. We'd go by automobile as I remember; they went by team first.

*Your parents did?*

Yes. They'd go to Sacramento. That's when my grandmother lived there—my grandmother Dickinson.

*From the north end of Reno up there, off the Red Rock Road, what route did you take to get to, say, Sacramento?*

They usually went down the Feather River [Canyon].

*How did you pick up the Feather River Canyon road?*

There used to be a road that crossed the Long Valley Creek—came up on the west side of Long Valley Creek and then went down the canyon through the Feather River [Canyon]. That's through Sierra valley, down through Portola and Quincy and that way.

*You wouldn't go down to Loyalton and go down like to where Hallelujah Junction is?*

No. That would be a lot further.

*Is that road still in existence today?*

Yes. That's the highway through there. The road did not come near Hallelujah. It come up on the west side. There was no road down through there [Hallelujah] then; there was a railroad down through there. But the main road—395—hasn't been there so [long].

*So it was a different road?*

Yes.

*I have a question to ask you about the Red Rock Road since we're talking about roads. Where the Red Rock Road is today, where you come off north of Stead there, that's not the original road, is it?*

No. The original road took off in there by Black Springs.

*Did it go through what became the Stead air base?*

Yes.

*Did that change when the federal government came in and bought Stead Air Base and established that?*

That's when the road was moved around the base because they fenced it.

*They didn't want people going across the air base?*

Yes.

*Do you remember when Stead came in?*

About 1932 or 1934, I guess.

*Who had owned that property?*

It was government land. That is, when the railroad came through, the government gave them every other section for 20 miles on each side of the railroad. Out to the railroad limit, why, every other section was railroad land. So they had to buy the railroad land and then just took over the government land.

*A question on the railroad. An old topo map that is in the Mines Library at the University of Nevada-Reno shows the railroad as going around what's now that large body of water out there by Cold Springs.*

Yes. That's what we call Dry Lake. The railroad went around the east side.

*Do you remember when that railroad was moved to the west side?*

Well, actually, the railroad used to go up by what they call Black Springs. It went up by across where Stead is. There's kind of a pass where it went through by Cold Springs, to keep from going over that mountain that's in there—that sandy mountain—or else going over where the highway goes over now; it was quite a raise. They went through and then came back around the end of the hill there where Black Springs is and then went on down where Highway 395 goes now. That was the N-C-O...Nevada-California-Oregon (Railway).

They nicknamed it "Never Come Along." We used to go down there and meet the [train] and get quite a bit of freight off of the railroad when it was running because right where the Red Rock Road went in, they stopped there. That would be on the north end.

*Up in Long Valley?*

Yes. We'd meet the railroad, and sometimes we'd wait for hours; we knew when it was supposed to come along.

On the N-C-O railroad, after it first went in, why, they had this superintendent and his name was Flanagan. And they had a section boss by the name of Finnegan. So if they'd have something happen on the railroad, Finnegan would rush around and get the thing agoing, and then he'd sit down and write about a 6-page letter to Mr. Flanagan, just what happened, and he'd go into detail. So Flanagan saw him one day, and he told him, he said, "Listen. Make it short and snappy. I haven't got time to be reading those long letters."

So it went along a while, and pretty soon they had a wreck on the train, and old Finnegan jumped around and got the thing agoing in a hurry. Then he set down and he wrote this letter: "Dear Mr. Flanagan: Off again. On again. Going again. Finnegan."

He added, "Is this short enough for you?"  
[laughter]

*Did Mr. Flanagan know there'd been a wreck?*

I guess he did.

They told a story about it that this woman got on the train up there in Alturas; it run clear up into Alturas. She got on the train, and she was about to have a baby, and the conductor was pretty mad about it. He come in and he told her, he said, "Well, you ought not got on here when your re in that shape. She said, "I wasn't in that shape when I got on here."

*Did she have her baby on the train? [laughter]*

Yes, she had her baby on the train!  
[laughter]

*To back up just a minute, you weren't born in 18891890, but that winter was extremely harsh all across this northern part of the country. Did your father ever tell you any stories about how the Red Rock ranch was affected by that winter?*

Well, we lost a few cattle he claims, but there was an old Spaniard [Mr. Giraldo] who lived over on the ranch I afterwards bought, what they called the Campbell ranch. He had about 500 head of cattle, and he lost them all but an old dairy cow. He came over and got enough hay to keep that.

*Did that wipe him out?*

That wiped him out.

*OK, but your family on the Red Rock...?*

They had their cattle where they took care of them pretty well.

*Wow, I've read and I've heard that prior to this harsh winter a lot of the ranchers who ran cattle weren't into putting up hay. They pretty much just trusted the elements, and in the spring there would be hay and the cattle would get through. They weren't much for managing the range, but this really harsh winter a lot of them decided that maybe they better start putting up hay. Is that true?*

That's true. They found out that winters come along that the cattle couldn't make it through. The snow got too deep, and there was no tractors or anything to open the road. They lost an awful lot of cattle.

*But if it had to be that bad, a good point about it was that the ranchers started to put up hay and manage their livestock a little bit more. Now, in the summertime, like on the Red Rock at this time, your father and grandfather would just let the cattle range for themselves?*

Yes. Especially after I was older and we increased the herd, we didn't have enough hay there unless we did run them out summer and winter.

*So in the wintertime, then, before you were born, did they bring the cattle back in around the ranch in the valley and keep them there?*

Yes, they did. They didn't run so many cattle then, and they used to practically keep them there the year round on the meadows.

*Even in the summertime they didn't have to put them out, but then you remember when they were running more cattle and they would, in order to have sufficient feed for them?*

Yes, ever since I can remember, why, they'd run a lot of cattle out on the open range.



*Even after you can remember they did it in the wintertime, too?*

Yes.

*Now, did your family change its practices very much about putting hay up after that harsh winter? Or were they running so few head that they didn't have to bother so much with it?*

Yes, I think they did. Of course, as I was growing up, we just learned to have feed there on the ranch in case of a heavy winter, so we could feed the cattle. There was a lot of people, like Dick Cowles. He used to run out in the [north]eastern part of the state, and he used just survival of the fittest—if a few cattle died he figured well, at was a cheap way to run them. He didn't have to buy hay or anything. He didn't have any means of putting up hay, and he was quite a famous man. He was a senator at one time, too.

*In 1914, the Mt. Lassen volcano blew. Do you remember that at all? You were born in 1904.*

I don't remember too much about it. I really don't. At that time—it isn't very far now—but it was quite a ways from us.

*It didn't cause any big stir or a lot of problems?*

No. As I remember, there was no ash or anything fell here.

*You have mentioned Virginia City off the tape. Did your father ever tell you much about any interaction with Virginia City at all?*

My grandfather Dickinson—my dad's father—he's the one that used to haul the hay in there that got the name of Tule Frank. [A] mountain out there by the ranch is named

Tule Mountain after my grandfather. They call it Tule Peak, that highest place, which is around 9,000 feet, just up from between Pyramid and the Winnemucca ranch.

He was quite an old character. He said one time that he was sitting at the table, and they were playing a game of cards. They got in a little argument, and he was sitting there, and he reached back in his pocket for his handkerchief. He said just in a flash he was looking down the barrel of a .45, and this guy told him, "Frank, don't ever do that again. If I hadn't known you didn't pack a gun I'd've killed you."

*Who was the man?*

I don't know. Just a gambler in Virginia City. He [Tule Frank] said that when he first went there—you've been up there?

*Oh, yes.*

On the hill, where the graves are, there were just very few there. Just in a year or 2, he said, the whole hillside was covered with graves—and two-thirds of them died with their boots on. In other words, they were shot.

*Well, I know there's one up there where it says "Murdered" on the tombstone.*

It was a pretty wild place, I guess.

*Tule Frank would go up there when he was, like, in Washoe Valley and had that ranch there. Then after he moved out to the Winnemucca ranch, did he go up to Virginia City?*

He did business up there.

*Did your dad ever spend much time up there?*

No, my dad didn't.

*Did you as a young man?*

No.

*Was the Red Rock ranch affected at all when Virginia City more or less started on borrasca, to decline in the mining?*

No, it didn't have any effect.

*What was your ranch house like as you remember it when you were growing up?*

We had 3 bedrooms, and it had been built onto. In fact, we were going to remodel after I'd bought the ranch. We had a contractor come out there, and he looked at it and he said, "What have you got?" In other words, it was built right on the ground; they never bothered even to hardly put rocks under it—no foundation. We finally decided that we had the contractor there ready to build, so we'd go from scratch, and we built right behind it and left it there until we got the house finished and then tore it down.

*So the house you grew up in isn't there any more?*

No.

*The original house, the one that you grew up in, were the bedrooms upstairs in that?*

No, it was a one-story.

*Was that common to have one-story houses out here?*

I don't know. I think, like up in the valley up there, why, it wasn't common.

*You mean in Truckee Meadows or Long valley area?*

No, up in around Minden....

*Carson Valley, yes. A lot of the old houses are 2-storey down there. But yours didn't even have a basement or any foundation?*

Sitting right on the ground. Oh, they might have put maybe a rock or 2 under the beam, but it practically was right on the ground. No foundation.

*That'd make the floors awfully cold in the wintertime, wouldn't it?*

Yes.

*Did you have a parlor? Old houses, I know it was a custom in a lot of places to keep one room kind of separate and closed off unless you had company or were entertaining.*

Yes. We had a parlor.

*Did you leave it closed off a lot?*

Yes. Later years, we used it for a bedroom, after I was older.

*Do you know if that was a Danish custom—to have a parlor?*

I think it was, yes.

*Then you had a kitchen?*

Yes.

*Did you have a living room at all or a separate dining room?*



Yes. We called it a living room. Kitchen, living room, and then a dining room, and then this parlor, and then 2 bedrooms off to the side.

*Did you ever eat in the kitchen, or did you do all your eating in the dining room?*

We did all our eating in the dining room; it was right next to the kitchen. It had a big, long table in there, and that's where we ate. We never ate in the kitchen.

*Did you even have a table in the kitchen?*

No, we had a counter in there, and a big, old wooden coal stove.

*Did your mother cook on that stove?*

Yes.

*What kind of a bed did you have when you were little?*

Oh, I'd say...I can't even remember! I think it had pretty good springs, though, as I remember.

*It wasn't a rope bed?*

No.

*What was the mattress filled with?*

I think it was kind of like straw, as I remember.

*Did you have to change that a lot, or were they just filled and you let it go?*

Well, I think we changed them. They don't hold up like mattresses today.

*How often would you have to change those?*

Oh, I'd say every year, practically. They get lumpy.

*I'll bet! [laughter] I bet they crinkled a lot, too, didn't they?*

Yes.

*Was that part of the spring housecleaning, to change the mattress straw?*

Yes.

*Did your pillows have down in them, like goose down?*

Yes.

*Did your mother and grandmother raise the geese for those?*

Ducks.

*In your family, who was in charge of discipline—your mother or your father or both?*

My dad was pretty strict; he really was. And he was very cautious. He was always afraid something was going to happen to us. Even with my kids when they were growing up, because we raised our kids there with my folks—afraid the kids would get hurt if they were small, like on a tractor too young, and those kind of things. He was a cautious man. He raised me that way.

*Was your mother that cautious?*

No, she wasn't that cautious. She, more or less, was more lenient.

*Did that present a conflict between your parents at all?*

I don't think so.

*When you were little—speaking of discipline and caution and authority—when you were playing around the house, did you have to let your mother know where you were?*

Yes. There were a lot of things could happen to you out there when there's nobody around to watch you.

*Well, if nothing else, you could just wander away for miles!*

That's right.

*What kind of disciplinary action would your parents use if you children transgressed and did something wrong? What kind of punishments did they use?*

You'd get a good spanking.

*Did they use a switch for that? You always hear these old stories of "out behind the barn." Did they handle it that way?*

No, not particularly.

*Do you feel they were pretty fair in that kind of thing?*

They were real fair.

*I know on a ranch or farm, with a lot of families, the men were always out doing the heavy work and the women were inside—that's very traditional. In your family, were the roles that defined? Were the women limited to the house, or could the women go out and work*

*with the stock and do some riding and help with the chores, this kind of thing?*

Well, my mother used to do a lot of riding. But actually, like my grandmother, she was strictly a housewife. She [grandmother] didn't do outside work that I remember. But my mother, she did. But that's mainly what she did; she did a lot of work in the garden and stuff like that, which my wife also did.

*Your father wouldn't mind if the women helped out with the heavy work and the animals? I know some families, like some in Carson Valley, the women didn't do that. For the most part, many of them were strictly in the house and not allowed to work with the horses or work with the livestock.*

Well, that was the only thing that, as I remember, my mother...no, she didn't work out labor-like. But she did ride because she liked to ride. So she did it.

*What about women's chores in the house? Your parents had 2 children, and one of them was a boy. Did your mother teach you such things like cooking and how to do some basic sewing, such as buttons and things?*

No.

*She figured you'd find a good woman to take care of you, right?*

Right.

*Did you kind of slack off from the work on Sunday? Did you kind of relax a little bit more then?*

Yes, I think a little bit.

*Was Sunday a special day, like maybe a big noon dinner? Where I come from, Sunday is a day to get together with the family and have a big special meal, which you don't have necessarily during the rest of the week.*

Yes, there was quite a bit like that.

*Did a lot of your neighbors go to church?*

Well, there wasn't too many close neighbors. See, my closest neighbor was about 12 miles away, out towards Doyle. That was Galeppi. They were Swiss-Italian. There was 3 brothers—Fred, Charlie and Leo.

*Did they all ranch?*

No, there was 4; there was another one, too—Johnny. There was 5. One of them—I can't think of his name, but they live down in Portola now. This one boy—one left.

*When you were growing up on the ranch, did you have electricity?*

No.

*How did you light the ranch? What kind of light did you use?*

We had coal oil light—lamps.

*Did you ever have kerosene lamps at all when you were growing up that you remember?*

That's the same thing, kerosene and coal oil.

*How did you heat the ranch house?*

Oh, it was a wood stove. Big, old pot-bellied wood stove. It practically heated the house. It was in the living room. We didn't

heat that dining room. Later years, why, we did have a stove in the dining room, too.

*The off rooms where you didn't do a lot of living . .*

That's why we didn't heat it.

*Did you heat the bedrooms at all?*

Our bedrooms were not heated.

*Did you have a lot of feather beds, big quilts and big blankets and things like that?*

No.

*What kind of blankets did you have on your beds?*

Oh, they were just, I guess, wool.

*Was it a problem staying warm sometimes in the winter?*

Sometimes. The house was pretty cool when you got up in the morning—I can remember that.

*I'll bet it was! Did you burn coal in the stove?*

We didn't have too much coal, but what coal we did we bought in Reno from the Steinheimer brothers [Frank H. and Otto]. They were located on the corner of [Fourth] and Sierra. They had a wood and coal business and the Studebaker [Agency]. Do you remember the Studebaker?

*Yes, I do. My grandma had a 1947, which I used to drive. Where did you get your wood? Did you cut your own wood for the house?*

Yes, we cut those juniper trees down.

*Up on the hills around the ranch?*

Yes.

*Was that a year-round thing, or would you go out, say, like a couple days and cut all the wood at once for the season?*

We had a 4-horse team on those big wagons, and we'd go out and cut the wood up in stove wood length and bring it right in.

*When did you first get electricity on the ranch?*

That was in 1956.

*What was the first electric appliance that you remember getting?*

Let's see. I guess it probably would be the refrigerator, I imagine. Actually, the first refrigerator was a gas refrigerator.

*When did you get that one?*

About 10 years before that, I guess. They called it a Servelle, and it used this bottled gas. When we were first married we had the Flame-o lights—gas lights, with a regular mantle. You'd put them on and then burn the mantle, and it would blow up. They gave a pretty good light.

*Now, did you have a gas reservoir for those, or did you have bottled gas?*

Bottled gas.

*Where did you buy the gas for it?*

We bought it here in Reno from Standard Oil.

*Did electricity make a lot of big changes on the ranch for you?*

It really did.

*Like what kinds of things, other than household appliances? How did it make other changes?*

Well, you could have grinding wheels—and your electric bills and those kind of things—which made it a lot easier to do your own automobile repairing, as we were out where we had to do quite a bit of our own repair work.

*Before that, how did you do your repair work? What kind of facilities did you have on the ranch to fix machinery?*

Oh.. .well, just by hand.

*Did you have a blacksmith shop or forge?*

My dad was a real good blacksmith. He could weld and everything else. He had a forge—where you turn the bellows?

Yes.

You got that kind of coal—it wasn't regular coal. It was a little different coal—the blacksmith coal was. It was a little finer, I think. We got it here in Reno; they had what they call blacksmith coal there at that same place. It was a little better refined; it didn't come in big, heavy chunks. You'd start that up and get a good fire, and then heat your iron just right. He used to put tires on the wagon wheels and everything. I can remember him doing this. You'd get just about the right size, and then you get your whole rim hot and put it on there, and then get cold water and shrink it on. It was on there so tight that you couldn't... because that rim had to be tight on there.

*So you were pretty self-sufficient, then, that way on the ranch?*

Yes.

*Did your dad do blacksmithing for other people?*

No. We'd shoe our own horses.

*Were there other blacksmith shops? Now, your dad did just blacksmithing on the ranch. Were there any blacksmith shops in that area, say, up toward Doyle or over toward Constantia?*

No, in Reno here there was.

*Do you remember where that shop was and who owned it?*

There was one down there just off of Second. You know where the Western Pacific Railroad depot is on Second? It was right across the street from there. Do you know where that Basque eating place is—Louie's Basque?

Yes.

It's right next to Louie's Basque. That's the depot; that's as far as Western Pacific comes in off the mountain—it comes right in there, see.

*Down off of Evans Street. Do you remember who owned that?*

I don't remember. They called them livery stables, and, like, when we came to town with a team and buggy, you could leave your horse there overnight, see. They had facilities—the blacksmith shop in conjunction with a livery stable.

*Were there more than one of these in Reno?*

Yes, there was. I think the other one was on Keystone up there about where the old Reno Iron Works used to be, on Keystone next to the railroad. It'd be on the north side of the railroad.

*I think a couple years ago there was still a building that had the old Reno Iron Works sign on it, if I'm not mistaken.*

It did, yes. I'm sure there used to be a livery stable right there, too. But we used to stay at that one down there [by the Western Pacific depot].

*When did you first get telephones on the ranch?*

Well, that came about a year or 2 after we had electricity. We started negotiating about a phone with the people up from Susanville.

*Why in Susanville?*

Well, we didn't think the Bell Telephone would be interested. We even got a hold of a bunch of wire, and it was used wire. Finally, one day this guy came in, and he said, "You know, we can't serve you," he said. "You're in Nevada."

I said, "Well, it's a fine time to find that out!"

So he said, "Why don't you go in and see Bell?"

*In Reno?*

Yes. We did, and we were quite happy about that because we were on that long distance line that goes north into Alturas, [California]

*So you finally got a phone line through?*

Yes, we came in on the REA [Rural Electrification Association] poles. They were electricity poles, and they gave us permission to hang the wire, which was a little bit illegal—to hang a phone line underneath electricity like that. At first, there was quite a little bit of controversy that you could get electrocuted if one of the lines'd break and fall across the telephone like or something like that, see. But we had arresters put in that stop that.

*But that saved having to put up a whole different set of poles?*

Oh, yes. It didn't take hardly any time to string the wire.

*Once the lines were in, did you have many instances, especially, say, during the winter, when your service would go out because of downed lines?*

Well, we had some outages from electricity. But mainly, I had to work on my own lines, really—not the electric lines but the phone line.

*So if something happened there, you were a major repairman on that part?*

That's right. It really was too long a span—the electric poles were a little too long, too far apart for that small a wire, see.

*So you were on telephone service out of Reno?*

Yes. They called us Red Rock One.

*Did the telephone make a big difference on the ranch? Did it change things?*

Yes. Medical was a lot easier, then. Before we got the telephone, we got this telephone

in the car—before we had the phone in the house. Meanwhile, we were all wanting to communicate. We were kind of in a park up there, and you had to go way down in the field in order to get out. And the operators wouldn't hold a call for us, see. It wasn't too good because we had to drive down below in the field, and nobody could call us—in other words, we could go down there and call out.

*Why wouldn't the operators hold the calls for you?*

I don't know. Just there were too many operators, I guess, and they wouldn't cooperate with us at all. If they would've held the calls, they could've told the party, "Well, you call at a certain time," and we could've gone down in the field—to see if we had any calls—away from the mountains. But it didn't work out; we tried all ways in order to do it.

*Couldn't get them to cooperate?*

No. And it was fairly expensive, too.

*Even that radio phone?*

Yes, it was pretty expensive.

*Was finally getting a phone line into the ranch terribly expensive?*

No, it didn't cost too bad because we got some used wire. It was a little hard to maintain—if we'd get heavy snow or something it would break. But we had a fellow in here that worked for Bell Telephone that we got acquainted with, and we'd get a hold of him, and he would come out and work on the line for it. But I



did quite a bit of work myself on it. I had the wire stretchers and everything; I'd go in there and repair it.

*Were you long distance from Reno?*

Yes, it was long distance.

*Were you on a party line? Did you share that line with anybody else?*

No, it wasn't a party line in there. We were the only ranch. Except that we were on the line that went to Ravendale.

*Now, where is that?*

Well, that's up north, as you go towards Alturas.

*Your line from the ranch connected into a main line?*

That's right. That was a party line. As far as I knew, there was about 3 different stations like we were, see. There was a little gas station, is all it was—a place you could get a sandwich—on 395, going north.

*Is that up where Doyle is?*

No, it was way beyond there, beyond Susanville.

*Did sharing a line cause any problems?*

No, I wouldn't say caused too many, except maybe you'd hear them get on or something.

*You knew they were rubbering in?*

Yes.

*When did you get the first motorized vehicle on the ranch?*

That was a Ford tractor. I think we got that just about the time that Larry was born, 1939.

*So before that, it was all horse power?*

All horse power. And my dad was pretty hard to convince.

*Why was that?*

Well, he was just an old-timer, and he knew what horses would do. He couldn't see a tractor for quite a while, but he came to it.

*Did any of your ranch friends have tractors or cars on their ranches by this time?*

I think they probably came about the same time, I imagine.

*Did you have an automobile on the ranch at all, before this?*

Yes, I was pretty small. I imagine I was about 8, 9 years old when they got the cars, maybe 10.

*Do you remember what the first automobile was that you had on the ranch?*

They called them an E, M and F.

*What did that stand for?*

Every Morning Fix them! [laughter]

*Did you drive that a lot when you were younger or was that mostly your father who drove?*

That was my father's, yes. That was in about 1922 when I had that Haines. My dad had at one time bought into the Haines agency, about where the Eldorado Hotel is on Plaza?

*He bought into a car dealership in Reno?*

It was a hotel right on the corner of Sierra and Plaza, and then there was a row of little stores on down to Virginia on Plaza. That's in there where he had the agency. He took these cars in, and I talked him out of this old car. I was going to high school at the time. And boy, I was a big wheel, then, when I had a car.

*I'll bet you were! [laughter] Why did your father buy into an automobile agency?*

I don't know. I can't remember how come he did that, but these 2 people he bought in with, they didn't have much fire to them or anything. I guess he went in there and bought a Haines and got interested. They were about ready to go broke, so I think he put up some money for them. So my dad sold a car to my uncle, and he took this old car in, so he let me have it for school.

I didn't bother to get a license right away. My dad was on the ranch, and I was there [Reno] and I stayed with my grandmother. He had a lot of these "License Applied For" there at the store. They kept disappearing; I thought the kids were tearing them off. So I just put another one on— "License Applied For." One day, there was 2 policemen here. One was Bill Dean, and the other was [Richard] Heap; they were well-known officers here when this town was small. One of them was sitting in a sidecar, and the other was on the motorcycle—they drove up alongside. They jerked this off and said, "Buy a license for this

thing, or don't come downtown any more!" So I had to buy a license, then!

*How much did the license cost?*

Oh, it wasn't too much.

*You didn't have to take driving tests or anything back then, did you?*

No.

*When you had your car, or when your father bought a car for the ranch, where did he buy his gas for that?*

Well, I think we bought 50-gallon drums and hauled them home.

*Would you buy that from the same people who had the coal oil?*

Standard Oil.

*Where was Standard Oil Company located in Reno?*

Well, it'd be on West Second, about up where Keystone is. They had a big plant up there. Then later years, we put in a big tank on the ranch, and Standard Oil came out and would fill it, see. We'd pay them to drive out, then. It was a 500-gallon tank.

*Where would you get things for the car like the belts and the plugs and other parts?*

There used to be a store in here for years—I think there's still one by that name—Reno Motor Supply [Company]. They used to be on Plaza there, too.



*Did you have snow tires back then for an automobile?*

No. The tires were a headache. One time when we went to Portland—I went up there with my folks when I was smaller—and I think he took about 5, 6 tires with him. They didn't last...kept blowing out. Of course, we didn't go the speed we do.

*Yes, I remember my dad changing lots of tires.*

Yes, it was quite a chore, too, because they were hard to get off, those old tires on those stiff rims. They'd rust on there, and the beads—he had an awful time getting them off and on. He didn't have this hydraulic stuff that just pushes them right off now.

We were going north to stop to eat in Red Bluff. Red Bluff's a pretty hot place; it's around 100 or better, I suppose—probably 110, 115. Well, the little time that we were there in Red Bluff—I remember this very distinctly—we heard about 5 tires go off.

*On different cars?*

They were just parked there, and bang they'd go! Because of the heat. No tire blows up now.

*No. Well, if your father could accept having an automobile, and that was OK—and even buying into an automobile agency—why didn't he want to go mechanized as far as ranch equipment?*

Well, I don't know; he just liked horses better, I guess. He raised work horses.

*Any particular breed?*

Yes, they were Percherons.

*Did he start this herd, or did his father start it?*

My dad started it. He got a stallion. They weren't real blooded horses, you know, but they were good work horses. And oh, they weigh probably 1,300, 1,400 [pounds], too.

*Did he raise just his own herd, or did he raise enough to sell to other ranchers around?*

No, he didn't sell them, because it'd take quite a few horses to hay and everything.

*About how many horses did he raise?*

Oh, I don't know...probably 20 head of work horses to put up the hay.

*Did you also have saddle horses?*

Yes.

*These were different from the work horses?*

They were different.

*Did you raise the saddle horses, too?*

Well, several of them were run off the range; they were wild horses.

*Who broke the horses?*

We had a man there that broke quite a few horses, named Johnny Subran.

*Did he work for you on a regular basis?*

Yes. He worked for my dad on a regular basis.

*He was real good with horses?*

Yes.

*Did your dad ever break horses, or did you break horses?*

My dad did, too. I broke horses.

*How would you go about breaking a horse? Would you break in work horses differently from how you'd break in a saddle horse?*

Quite a bit.

*How would you break a work horse?*

First, you'd get him gentle so you can handle him, and teach him to lead. First you'd rope him, and then you get him in a corral where it's close. He used to tie one hind leg up, so he couldn't hurt you. Then get an old sack or something; get him all used to being around him, because they kick and raise [the] devil when [you] first get a hold of them.

*You mean you'd get an old sack and rub him with it?*

Yes. Get him used to that. Then you'd probably tie him up for quite a while and get him used to [that]. Then you lead, see, after he finds out he can't get away from you.

He used to have this one horse—a big, heavy horse, a nice horse—and we were trying to break him. I used to have him tied up to the feed rack there, when we were breaking him, and had a long rope on him, and he'd get smart. We'd take him to water to

the watering trough, and as soon as he was through drinking, he'd roll, and he knew he could throw the rope right over his back. Then he'd hotfoot you across the corral. So I finally thought, "I'll fix you!" [laughter] I had a big post there by the watering trough, and I put a chain underneath in his halter. It was hooked on the one side, so it would pull up. That was pretty rough treatment because I took a turn around the post, and when he turned and took off, it almost broke his jaw. [laughter]

*He got caught short!*

It's the last time he ever did it, though!

*Well, at least he was smart! [laughter] How old were these work horses? Now, this is a work horse you're talking about. Would you do this to even a saddle horse to start him?*

Oh, some of them got to be 8, 10 years old.

*Before you broke them?*

Well, no, not before we broke them.

*How old would they be when you'd start breaking them?*

Oh, we tried to break them when they were 3, 4 years old.

*Up until that time they really had been just allowed to run free and hadn't had much control or contact?*

Yes. Then you'd usually take a good gentle work horse and put him in with [the other horse]. Like, if you're going to mow hay—put him in there, and put a regular harness on

him. Of course, they wouldn't pull at first, but they'd finally come around to it.

*You'd use the other horse to train the new one?*

Mow grain or anything; you'd handle him, and he'd hold the other horse, see, if he'd start to run, more or less. Sometime they'd run off with you, too.

*How would you break the saddle horses?*

Well, you'd do it a lot the same way, only then have to get him used to being on him. Sometimes, you'd get on and off him. I never did just get on them and try to let them buck; I'd try to keep them from bucking, because I always figured that once they learned how to buck that they were hard to get it out of their heads.

*Well, you see in the movies a lot when ranchers are breaking horses, it's the big thing to have all the men hanging over the corral, and they usually...*

Just climb on and go.

*Yes. Did they really do it that way? Was that common practice?*

I knew they did before my time, but I never broke horses that way.

*Did you know anybody who did?*

No. I guess some of them did, all right. There used to be these regular bronc riders. They rode a lot of bucking horses. They'd take these old horses that they'd use in rodeos and take them and make saddle horses out of them, see? It's hard to ever get that buck

out of them. But they just beat it out of the horse, see. If he'd start to try to buck, then they'd just beat the devil out of him. But I never allowed them to start bucking—I never beat my horses.

This one place, we had some cattle in here on feed. I didn't have my regular saddle horse then, and I borrowed this horse, one of these horses that had been done that way, see. I rode him clear out here by that hot springs. We were going to move the cattle from down on this ranch where the university farm was—Questa ranch. So we had our cattle there on feed, and we were taking them out there to the Lands ranch by Steamboat. So I thought, this horse is acting awful funny, and he wanted to buck, see. He was afraid to buck, so he just threw his head down and ran off with me. I'd rather have him buck any time!

*Yes! Instead of going head down on you!*  
[laughter]

Because you don't know what they're going to run into. Yes. He just threw his head back against his chest because he thought he was going to get beat up. See, this guy just beat it out of him.

*That's pretty cruel. What kind of horses were your saddle horses? Were they any particular breed?*

Oh, there were different breeds of them. Mainly, they had quarter horse in them. I never liked these real just quarter horses; they haven't got much life in them.

*You like a cross-breed type.*

I like [to] get some hot blood in them. I don't like this just sit and hammer on a horse

all day to get him to go. A lot of those quarter horses are that way.

*A little slow-witted?*

Yes...and slow-gaited.

*Well, if you would go out and get some wild horses off the range, did you use those for saddle horses if you could break them?*

Yes. They had some pretty good horses that we run off the range.

*Now, did ranchers around your area do that as a common practice—go out and get the wild horses?*

I think they did, from there to Susanville, yes.

*Did they do that because the horses were available, and they didn't want to buy other horses?*

That's right.

*Did it also help to control the wild horse population on the range?*

It probably did, yes.

*Today, that's a big issue—these wild horses and the burros. Do you remember that as being a real important issue with ranchers when you were young?*

Not like it is today, because I think ranchers more or less took care of them themselves.

*Oh, in other words, they didn't wait for the government to step in and take care of*

*them—I think I got your meaning! When the ranchers took care of the horses, did they do this as individual ranchers, or would they get together in groups and go do that?*

No, I think they...the ranchers just kept that to themselves.

*You didn't even talk about it with your buddies?*

No.

*On the ranch, what did you feed your horses? Did you raise feed for them, because horses need grain and oats, don't they?*

No, we never fed too much grain, no.

*Just grassed them out?*

Well, no. That grass hay in that high country has got a lot of kick to it. In other words, it's got a lot of protein. That's about all we fed. Maybe when we were riding the horses real hard gathering the cattle, then we had a lot of grain that we fed them—and rice.

*You didn't raise any grain, then, on the ranch for the cattle or the horses?*

No. At times we'd raise other grain, but mainly we didn't have all that amount of water, and we didn't like to plow up those meadows because if you haven't got too much water, you plow them up and it's hard to get them back.

*That's true. So you just left them natural. Did you raise alfalfa or anything?*

Oh, we tried to, but we didn't have too much success.

*So you just more or less let it go to natural hay?*

Yes.

*Did you harvest the hay?*

Yes, we harvested the hay. We used to put up loose hay in stacks. We put them up with what they call a buck rake—and bucked onto nets. You had a big net and then that would fold up around the hay and take it up—you dump it on the stack.

We used to get Indians to stack the hay for us. That's hard work stacking hay, because when you dump one of those big buck rake loads of hay, why, you got to scatter it around a little bit, because when you go to feed it out in the wintertime.... If you get somebody that won't move any of it, and then you get another big load laying on top of that one, you can't figure out how to get the hay out. One binding the other one in. But if you kind of move it around a little bit, why, then you don't have that trouble getting it out in the wintertime. We had this big, old Indian, and we used to have some rattlesnakes out there. This rattlesnake came in, and somebody on the ground hollered there'd be a snake in this one—a rattlesnake. He got scared—and the stack was already about 20 feet high—and he said, "Run, boys, run! Every man bite him." He jumped off of the stack! [laughter]

*From 20 feet up?*

Yes! It's a wonder it hadn't killed him! [laughter] I wouldn't want to take a chance, but they were always in the hay like that; they were mainly trying to get away, I think. You weren't so apt to get bit, but just the same, I'd be afraid, too. If I knew one was in a load of hay, I wouldn't be just tramping around there! [laughter]

*You've mentioned the one hired man that you had. Did you have much Indian help on the ranch at all?*

My dad never went too much for Indians.

*Was there a reason for that?*

They weren't industrious enough; they were too lazy.

*Sophus Petersen was continually getting kicked off the ranch that he bought by the Indians coming through and telling him to leave. Were those mostly Paiutes or mostly Washo?*

I think they were Paiutes.

*Were they from around Pyramid Lake?*

Yes.

*Why was it that they didn't want Sophus on that land?*

In the early days, the Indians didn't want to lose the land. They resented it. You hear stories; I suppose the settlers came in and did things to them, too. But the Indians resented the white man coming and taking over.

*You mentioned to me off the tape about a large grinding rock that was on the ranch, kind of like a bedrock mortar. It had a lot of holes in it where the Indians would grind their seeds.*

Of course, I was too young; I don't remember that—only from what I've been told as I was growing up.

*Is the rock still there?*

The rock is still there.

*But you don't remember the Indians using it?*

No.

*Since that is there, is it possible that the meadow where the Red Rock ranch is was a prime gathering ground for the Indians?*

I think it was, pretty much, because my son, Larry, liked to hunt those arrowheads, and he had a nice collection of them.

*When you were growing up on the ranch, were there many Indian families that would travel through that area doing seasonal gatherings?*

They used to come through there quite a bit from Pyramid Lake with a wagon and sell fish—those Pyramid Lake trout.

*The cui-ui?*

No. The trout. I don't know the cui-uís; I never heard of it. But they had those big lake trout, and they had traps out. When I was just a kid, we used to go there and fish, and if you didn't catch any fish, why, those Indians could say, well, they'd sell you one. They'd catch fish, and then they'd put them in these traps. They'd go out and get them out of the trap and sell them to you.

*So you didn't have to go home empty?*

Yes.

*Did you go over to Pyramid to fish a lot?*

Yes, we went quite a bit.

*How would you fish over there? Did you have a boat, or would you fish off the shore?*

We'd get a boat from the Indians.

*You'd rent one from the Indians?*

Yes.

*How much would they charge you for a boat?*

Oh, I can't remember now exactly what they would charge. But I think for \$5 you could probably get to use it all day long. They weren't too good of boats.

*What kind of bait would you use to catch the fish? How would you go about fishing?*

Well, you'd usually use these big flashers and plugs and a spoon.

*Back to the Indians, when you were growing up, do you remember their doing much seasonal gathering or things along the ranch or around the ranch, like for pine nuts or elderberries or chokecherries or anything like that?*

No, because there wasn't much of that kind of thing around the ranch. There were some chokecherries.

*Did your father or your grandmother ever tell you any stories about the Indians coming around the ranch other than to sell fish?*

No, I never heard too many stories. But I can remember when they come to sell the fish. I can't remember how they could keep them so well, but I remember they were good fish.

*You mean keeping them because of the temperature?*



The heat, yes. They had no refrigeration or anything. I can remember that we bought them and that there wasn't anything wrong with them. They'd come through there with teams; they had no cars.

*Did your parents welcome the fish that the Indians brought? Did they like to buy fish from the Indians?*

Yes.

*Now, you mentioned that the Indians had no refrigeration or anything, and that brings up a good point—you didn't have any refrigeration at the ranch, either, until you got the gas refrigerator and then later the electric refrigerator. How did you keep foods cold or cool? How did you preserve foods on the ranch?*

Oh, we had these burlap coolers—actually, they're pretty good, too. You can sew burlap on a glass bottle—a gallon bottle—and you wet it and hang it out at night, and your water is pretty darn cold in the morning.

*Evaporation off the burlap?*

Yes. That's how we cooled. We also had a big box fixed up with burlap on it, and [to] keep our meat, we had a big stone cellar there that always stayed pretty cool and was pretty near flyproof. The fact is, we built a little cage inside this stone cellar and screened it so it was, you might say, flyproof. These walls had been laid up years ago with just clay and rocks; they were about 3, 4 feet thick, see, and they stayed pretty cool. If you'd open it up at night, let the draft through there—we had a window and a door—and close it up the daytime, why, you could keep meat pretty good in there.

*Did you have anything like a springhouse at all?*

No, we didn't have a springhouse.

*How would you keep milk and things like that cool?*

In there.

*Is that built into the ground at all?*

No, it was built on top of the ground.

*In the main house did you have an ice box?*

No. When we used to come to town just after Judie and I were married we did bring a 100-pound block of ice out from town. We'd put it in this box—just a regular, old box with a good, tight lid...a good, tight box—and put a lot of newspaper around the ice, and do you know, that ice would keep a long time that way. Newspaper is the best insulation.

*Where did you get your ice in town?*

Union Ice up on Fourth Street.

*On the west end of Fourth Street today there's the Union Ice Company. Is that it?*

Yes, Union Ice. That's been there a long time. Beyond that there was a creamery as you go down that little hill on the old road. I think it was just about in the city limits in there. We used to gather our cream up in those big cream cans till we got one full—because we didn't milk that much—and then when we'd go in, we'd take it in there.

*If you didn't milk much, how long would it take you? Was this a 10-gallon or 5-gallon cream can?*

It was 10. It'd probably take a couple weeks.

*Wouldn't that sour by the time you got it into the creamery?*

Yes, it was sour.

*They took it, anyway?*

Yes.

*What did they do with sour cream?*

I really don't know, but that didn't seem to matter how sour it was.

*How much would you get paid for 10 gallons of sour cream?*

Probably about \$9.

*Did deep freezers make a big difference for you on the ranch in how you handled your food storage?*

It sure did. Made it a lot easier to keep food. [Before that, though], the main things were these cellars, and then we had these coolers that you make out of a sack where water runs down over it?

Yes.

They're pretty good coolers.

*When you were growing up, did you have a garden on the ranch?*

Yes.

*Whose responsibility was that, mainly? Was it your mom's or the whole family's?*

Oh, the whole family—my mom's mainly.

*Did you and your sister have to help in the garden?*

Yes, we had to help some.

*That was one of your regular chores?*

Yes. We had a big garden. We raised potatoes, corn and carrots and beets and squash and lettuce...peas, beans.

*How did you preserve this food? I'm assuming that your mom would can a lot of it?*

You know, some of that stuff stays in the ground a long time.

*Like the root vegetables.*

Yes. And, like carrots, you can go out there even when the ground is frozen and get them. And, of course, the potatoes...we used to have a root cellar.

*Apart from the house?*

It was away from the house, up against the hill. It was dug out in the hill. And that's where we kept the potatoes.

*Did your mom can any vegetables—beans or peas, things like that?*

Yes. A lot of them. She did a lot of canning.

*Did you ever help with any of that, or did you leave that up to her?*

I left that up to her.



*Did you have fruit trees on the ranch?*

We had a few apple trees.

*How did you preserve the apples? Did she can those, or did she dry those?*

Well, mostly just put them in this root cellar, and they stayed pretty well in there.

*Did you ever sell any of your produce, say, take it into town or...?*

No. We used mainly all of it.

*You mentioned that your garden was quite large. About how large was it?*

Oh, I think it was probably an acre.

*Where did you get your seed for the garden?*

As I remember, we sent away to these seed catalogs.

*Did the whole family plan what was going to be put in the garden, or was that mostly your mom and your dad did that?*

Yes, Mom and Dad.

*What were some of your earliest chores on the ranch? I know you mentioned that you were about 3 or 4 when you got your first bummer lambs. What other kinds of chores did you and your sister, Frances, have to do?*

Feed the [calves], yes, and clean out troughs... things like that.

*Were you doing any milking at this time?*

No. We mainly milked just for our own use. Then, like I was telling you about the cream—there was more than we could use, especially if we had a fresh cow or 2, and we used to bring that in and sell to that creamery. Well, one time, we picked up this guy—I don't remember where the hired man was, or we needed an extra one. I guess he'd taken off—the hired man.

Judie Dickinson: They used to get thirsty, you know. They'd stay out at the ranch 2 months or something like that, and then they'd always get thirsty. They had to get rid of their money, and so they'd take a few days off in town, and he'd pick up somebody....

I picked this guy up, and he was pretty drunk. He had a suit on, and so when we got out to the ranch, why, I said, "There's a cow to milk."

"Oh, I'll milk that cow!"

I said, "No, I don't think you...do you know how to milk?"

And, "Oh, sure."

So, this old Jersey, he took and put his foot behind the cow. So he's amilking away there, and he [is] kind of like this [leg stretched out behind the cow], looking down. And this old cow was kind of funny—when you started milking her, she would go. So when he got through, he pulled his leg out with his suit on. "Well, I can tell you one thing," he said, this cow will never be constipated!" [laughter]

*You milked Jerseys. That was not your standard range cow.*

No, they're not milk cows, as a rule—the range cows.

*Some people milked range cows, instead of Jerseys or Holsteins or Guernseys.*

Yes, but I wasn't around Holsteins. I was around purebred Herefords.

*Why Herefords?*

Because they did the best on the range.

*When you say "purebred," did you have a breeding program for them? Did you start with a bull somewhere and then...?*

I used to come in to the Reno bull sale and buy most of my bulls. They were registered bulls.

*Then you had your own breeding program?*

Then at one time I bought I think it was 150 head of registered heifers—whiteface heifers—from a man by the name of [Al] Nichols. Street is named after him down there in Sparks. But he had a ranch over in Sierra Valley, and he was raising purebreds. For some reason or other, he wanted to get rid of this bunch of heifers, and I bought them, and this gave me quite a start.

*For the tape, what's the difference—or is there a difference—between a Shorthorn, a Hereford, and a whiteface? Can you distinguish all those for the tape, because a lot of people who are going to be reading this maybe won't know.*

Well, a Shorthorn is a Durham, mostly, and he is dark red.

*Does it have a white face...?*

No, not unless you cross them. They're a little bigger animal, I think. But it takes more feed to maintain them.

*Even on the range?*

Yes. And that's what I was interested in—for range...an animal that would do the best on the range.

JD: And the Black Angus, they're short-legged.

Well, the Black Angus came in later. I guess they do pretty good, too.

*Now, when you refer to whiteface, you're talking about the reddish cow with the white face on it, and that's the Hereford. How do you get the black cow with the white face? Is that an Angus cross?*

Well, that's an Angus cross.

*What's it crossed with to get the white face like that?*

You just get an Angus bull and put him with your whiteface cows, and you'll have a lot of white-faced black cattle.

*Are those good cows? You see an awful lot of those.*

I never did do it, but they claim now that it does make a pretty vigorous cross.

*Did you do selective breeding on the ranch, then? Did you actively keep records on anything?*

No.

*You just let the bulls run with the cows?*

Yes. Well, I just didn't let them run all the time, because I didn't want calves coming in the wintertime.

*So you did plan your breeding, at least, so that the calves would come in the spring, hopefully after most of the major storms came through?*

Yes. The calves would start coming about the first of March.

*Did you ever have to help your cows along?*

Quite a bit.

*I know a lot of ranchers in Carson Valley would try to get their cows in close during that time, so they could pay attention to them.*

Well, that's what I had to do, too. That was in the spring of the year, see, and so I had to get out there on the range and bring those cows in—the heifers—and, see, if they had trouble with their calf, well, I could help with them. Fact is, I lost a few that way, if I didn't find them. I'd find the cow or the heifer that couldn't have it.

*Let's go back to the food supply. Did the ranch supply all of your food needs, with all the crops that you raised out of your garden and with the animals that you raised?*

No. I think we had to buy a little, but not too much.

JD: You had to buy some staples.

*Like coffee, sugar, flour, tea—that kind of thing?*

Yes.

*Did you do most of your shopping in Reno or in Susanville?*

No, we did it in Reno.

*Do you remember any of the names of the stores you shopped?*

Yes, this [Bob] Nelson and [Ross] Petersen had a store [Reno Cash Store] in there across from where the Eldorado is.

*Weren't you telling me that The Sportsman bought them out or bought the building—the Piazza brothers?*

The Sportsman had that place right across the street.

*And that's where you did most your shopping?*

Yes. [They] were a Danish family.

*That was just a general merchandise food store, like your old general store-type thing?*

Yes, one of these kind you go in and just write down what you bought, and then in about a month you'd go in and pay your bill.

*Do you remember when that store quit being there and why it might have quit?*

JD: I would say 1938, 1940.

Yes, somewhere in there.

JD: Because they were there for a few years after I came into the family; they were there when Krestine was born in 1938, so I imagine they went out about 1940.

*Did you ever put up corned beef and dried beef and things like that?*

Yes.

*And did you have hogs on the ranch?*

We used to have, yes, several times. Every time I can remember, us kids hated those hogs.

*Why was that?*

Well, because they'd get in and root up everything, and we had to watch them.

*To keep them out of the garden?*

JD: Yes.

And every time my dad got into the hog business, why, it seemed like that was that way—it went down.

JD: In price, you mean.

*Bad timing.*

Yes. But we used to [butcher] our own hogs.... Have a barrel and put a good scalding hot water in there and then pull them in and out. Then, if you don't get the right heat on your water, you set the bristle, and then you have a heck of a time getting the hair off them, too.

*Would you scrape the hair off? Why wouldn't you just skin the animal?*

If you get exactly the right heat on your water, why, it darn near all comes off just by pulling it out of there.

*All the hair would?*

Yes.

*Well, would you use the hide for anything, then?*

No.

JD: Keeps the meat from drying out.

Yes, you leave the hide right on the hog.

*That's the rind, in other words.*

JD: That's right.

And I never did have much to do with them, but my dad used to fix the hams and the bacons and smoke them. We did it in that stone cellar right back of the house.

*What kind of wood would he use for smoke fuel?*

I think oak.

*Did you get that off the ranch, or did you have to buy that?*

Well, there was one place where we could get some oak there.

*On the ranch?*

Yes.

*Did your mom ever make salt-rising bread?*

Yes.

*Did she make it out of potatoes or out of cornmeal?*

She made it out of potatoes, as I remember.

*Did she do that because of a lack of yeast or just because that was the way she made bread?*

Well, that's the way she made her starter, see. There'd be the lack of yeast, all right, but she made her starter that way, and then she always had that starter.

*Did she keep that going, or did she use all the starter for each batch of bread?*

No, she kept that going.

*Because we make salt-rising bread in my family.*

Do you?

*Only we generally start it with corn and maybe put a little slice of potato in it or something. Yes, my dad makes that.*

Well, you know, I might be a little off on that; I don't know, just exactly...but she made the starter.

*They either started it with corn or with potato, but that was a real good thing to do when there wasn't any yeast.*

Yes. It was good bread, I remember that.

*It sure is! Did you raise chickens on the ranch?*

Yes, we had a few chickens. We always mostly had those Rhode Island Reds.

*For eggs and for chicken to eat?*

For eggs and meat.

*Did your mom make soap at all, or did you buy your soap?*

You made soap.

JD: When I first went to the ranch, we made soap. [laughter]

*They were still making it?*

JD: Yes. We used to use the hog fat—the lard—[to] make the soap with, and beef fat, too, but mostly hog fat.

*You mentioned that you'd gone into school in the seventh grade—started school in Reno. What did you do before the seventh grade? Where did you go to school?*

I went to school right there on the ranch.

*How old were you when you started school?*

How old would I have been?

JD: I don't know—6 or 7. You and Frances started together out there, and she finished the eighth grade when she was about 13 because you came in here when you were 11 years old to go to school.

*On a ranch like that, where were the classes held?*

We had a regular little schoolhouse there.

*Who built that?*

My dad did.

*Was it just a one-room schoolhouse?*

One-room schoolhouse.

*Where did it sit in relationship to the ranch house?*

Almost up against it but back behind. It was just my sister and I in the school. It was a county school, but there was another school over in Dry Valley. It's north. The road used to go that way to Doyle, and there was an old Spanish family lived over there. So they got half of the school money. Then my dad used to pay the other half, so we could have a full school year, and we'd board the teacher right there.

*Now, when you say that there was a Spanish family up there, did they come down and go to school with you, too?*

No. It's a little too far.

*OK. Then they got a teacher for half a year, and you got a teacher for half a year?*

Yes. County paid for her.

*But the teacher spent a half a year up in Dry Valley and then a half a year with you?*

No.

*How did that work?*

I guess when the school money was up, they didn't go to school any more that year.

*And your teacher was a full-year teacher?*

Yes. She lived in the home.

*Did you always have women teachers?*

Always had women.

*Were there ever any men teachers that you knew of in this area?*

None that I know of.

*And the women teachers, were they always single?*

Yes, I think they were always single.

*Do you remember any of the teachers in particular?*

Miss Caroline Reising.

*Why did she finally leave? You guys run her out of town, did you?*

[laughter] No, I guess she just got tired of being out in the country, and then she got married. She married a banker down [in Oakland or San Francisco]

*Well, for these teachers that lived on your ranch and the others in the area, was there much social life for them besides interactions with the ranch family? Did they have much opportunity to go and meet other people?*

No, they really didn't.

*Were they pretty attune to that, or would it be difficult for most of them?*

It was pretty well out in the sticks.

*Yes. I can imagine, more so than it is now, even.*

Yes.

JD:Your mother taught them how to make soap and how to knit and embroidery work.

Yes.

JD:And they read a lot...Caroline did.

*In the case of your ranch, especially, they just became one of the family, in a way?*

That's right. They were just like one of the family.

*Did your family keep in touch with any of them after they left?*

Yes.

*Were your teachers out on the ranch pretty well prepared in their subject matter?*

Yes, I think they were.

*Where did they get their preparation? Where did they go to school to learn?*

They'd all gone to school away from here, I think.

*What brought them to Nevada? Can you remember why any of them might have been in Nevada to teach?*

Just a job, I guess.

*What kinds of things did you learn in school? What kind of subject things?*

I think mainly reading, writing, and arithmetic and geography. History.

*Did you have to take Nevada history—state history— in school?*

Yes.

*Was there a school board or school trustees who oversaw your school?*

Yes.

*Did they ever come out and kind of see that you were learning what you were supposed to be learning?*

Yes, they did.

*How often was that done?*

Oh, I don't know. I suppose 2 or 3 times a year.

*Did you have to get up and recite for them?*

Yes.

*How did you feel about that?*

Well, you used to be scared. [laughter]

*What kinds of things would you have to recite to show them that you were learning what you were supposed to be learning?*



Oh, I just don't quite remember. They looked over our daily papers and tests.

*Were those school trustees people from the area, or were they people who worked for the state government?*

No, they worked here. [There was a] state superintendent.

*Did the state superintendent come out?*

Yes.

*He had to come all the way up from Sacramento, then?*

No. I was living in Nevada. I didn't own any land in California. I was right against the state line.

*Was it difficult for you to go to school on the ranch? Nowadays, kids leave home and they go away down the street a couple blocks or something—they get out of the home atmosphere. Was it difficult for you, knowing that all that ranch life and work was out there—and your activities and your interests—to sit there in that room?*

I think it was quite a bit.

JD: Well, they didn't have school if they were branding. They'd let you out of school that day.

Yes, they used to do that. I could participate in like the branding or....

*What about Frances? Did she participate in the heavy work, too, like branding?*

No.

*Could she have if she wanted to?*

Yes, I think she could. She rode quite a bit, but she wasn't very masculine.

JD: They learned a lot [in school] because they had a lot of homework. Teacher gave them homework so they wouldn't bother her in the evening. [laughter]

So we were quiet in the evening because we had our homework to do.

*When you had homework like that in the evening, you ate dinner and then your mother would clean up. Did Frances help clean up the kitchen and things after dinner, or were you 2 sent immediately to your homework?*

Oh, I think she helped with the dishes, and then we started our homework.

*Where did you do your homework? Did you go away to your rooms to do it, or did you do it at the kitchen table?*

No, we used to do it right there in the dining room.

OK. *Was that your main activity room in the evening, where the whole family gathered and did whatever the individuals were doing?*

That's where we had our meals and things.

*And then in the evening, is that just where you all sat and did your reading or whatever it was you'd be doing?*



Yes.

*During branding or roundup or whatever, did the teachers ever help with this kind of thing, too?*

No, I don't think so. I can't remember them helping. They used to like to watch.

*But they got time off, too, and could be part of the group if they wanted to?*

Yes.

*Was the schoolhouse still there when you sold your ranch?*

Yes.

*Do you know if it's still there now, or was it the last time you were out there?*

No, they tore it down. The floor is still there.

*How many grades did you finish out there?*

I finished 6 grades.

*To the sixth, and then went into Reno to school?*

I went into McKinley Park in the seventh grade.

*Was that a big switch for you? Was that traumatic for you?*

Very.

*Was it scary?*

Yes, it was.

*Can you tell me about your feelings? Can you think up what those feelings were like and how you felt about going in?*

Yes. You know, kids, don't you?

*Yes! [laughter]*

They like to pick on somebody that's green. It was quite a event in my life.

*Did you try to get out of it at all?*

No. I finally worked into it and had these kids, and we hunted and fished, and so I don't think it was terrible hard on me.

*Had you had much interaction with children your own age up to this time?*

Hadn't had any.

*Except your sister.*

Yes.

*Did you ever get together with other ranch families, so you might have met other kids, even if you didn't see them very often?*

No.

*So you really were quite isolated out there, then, as far as meeting other children.*

Yes, it was.

*Were you pretty self-sufficient in your own entertainment, like creating your own games and taking care of yourself?*

Yes, I guess I must have been.

*Yes, I would think. What kinds of things did you do to amuse yourself on the ranch?*

I've got pictures of them; I don't think there's any other pictures around of a 4-horse team of sheep.

*Oh, really? [laughter] Tell me about that.*

My dad used to have his fine buggy team harness. This was after the automobile was out. So we cut that harness up and made a sheep harness out of it.

JD: When they [the parents] went to town. When they came home one day, they had the harness cut down to fit the sheep. In those days, his mother told me it was one of the expensive harnesses.

They were real expensive.

*Do you remember what kind of punishment, if any, you got for that?*

No, but I guess we got reprimanded. [laughter]

*How old were you at this time?*

Oh, I think 11, 12.

JD: They didn't reprimand them too bad because the kids had done such a good job. They were in town overnight—his mother and father were—and so during the 2 days, why, they had completed this harness. When they saw how nicely it was made and just perfect to the sheep, why, they didn't say much to them.

We had a wagon that we used to haul hay, and we had a little place where we kept the sheep. And if you have ever had anything to do with sheep...?

*Enough to know! [laughter]*

It's pretty near impossible to teach them anything. And the minute you try to get a hold of them to do anything, they just lay down. My sister used to have a lot more patience with them than I did. I usually would start banging them around! [laughter]

*No wonder they didn't want to do anything for you! [laughter]*

But, anyhow, we taught them to drive and...4-horse.

*Four-sheep.*

Four-sheep. [laughter]

*How long did it take you to teach those sheep to harness and draw together as a team?*

Oh, quite a little while. Yes. But they were pretty cute, and we got a big kick out of it. [looking at a photograph of the 4-sheep hitch] Gave us something to do...I mean, if you know sheep.

In the spring of the year, why, McCarran used to have sheep up on top of the mountain.

*Pat McCarran?*

Yes, Pat McCarran. He grazed sheep on top of the mountain.

*That was before grazing laws and all that kind of stuff?*

Oh, yes.

*Why did he pick the top of Petersen Mountain?*

Now, that I can't tell you, but that's where he had his range, up in there.

*Did he have a ranch around here?*

Yes, he had a ranch down the river here.

*Down east of town, right?*

JD: Where his sister is now.

*But up on Petersen Mountain, that's a pretty rugged mountain.*

Well, I'll tell you what I think it was. ..there was a sheep trail through there, see.

*Like a Basque herder trail?*

Yes, where several bands of sheep used to go that route from summer to winter. Most of them wintered out on the desert, the Nevada desert, and then a lot of them would go clear into the Sierra Nevada mountains. So that's how he got caught up there in this snowstorm.

*McCarran did?*

Yes, and these young lambs. I guess it was so rough—tough—he couldn't live up there, so at night he'd come down, and he'd bring these bummer lambs down and gave them to us kids.

*How old was Pat McCarran at this time?*

JD: Just a young boy. Before he finished college.

*Did their family have the ranch down on the Truckee River then?*

Yes.

*Were they a sheep-raising family? Was that primarily what they ranched?*

Yes, I think that was primarily what they ranched then.

*What other sheep ranchers would have used that sheep trail through there?*

Oh, [Bill] Campbell used to use it. And Saralequi.

*Saralequi, that's Basque, isn't it?*

Yes.

*That's his last name, right?*

JD: Saralequi is the last name, but they've got a ranch now in....

In Long Valley. He switched over to cattle now.

*Why did they switch to cattle?*

I don't know. It just got too tough with herders, I guess.

Yes, that has been a problem, I know. So you'd get these bummer lambs, then.

We used to get a lot of bummer lambs from Campbell, too, because he used to lamb about 7, 8 miles away from us.

*Now, for the tape, what is a bummer lamb?*

A bummer lamb is a lamb that's lost its mother.

*And sheep won't take on another's lamb, necessarily.*

Well, it's pretty hard to get them to do it. They skin the dead lamb and put it [the skin] on the bummer lamb and try it that way a lot of times. But it's pretty hard to get the ewe to take a stray lamb.

JD: See, if another sheep has twins, and they don't figure the mother has enough milk for them, why, they'll skin the other one's lamb if she's lost it and put it on the bummer lamb. And if she smells that pelt, she'll take that lamb.

*But it has to be an identifying smell.*

Yes.

*And when they won't do that, you ended up with a lot of bummer lambs?*

Yes.

*Was your father into raising sheep at this time?*

No.

*How did he feel about you having sheep?*

Oh, he didn't care. It was something to occupy our minds, I guess, and learn.

*Keep you out of trouble, right? [laughter] How old were you when you got your first bummer lamb?*

JD: Three or 4 years old.

Yes.

*They started you early on responsibility, huh?*

JD: That's what they did for play, and their interest was there.

*In Hollywood movies and things, and in the popular literature, we hear how cattlemen hated sheepmen, and sheepmen hated cattlemen, and you always see the poor, lonely herder getting shot by the outriders. How true was that? Was there really that hatred there?*

There really was.

*Well, how come you people—the Dickinsons being cattle ranchers and such—how come you didn't feel that way, at least about having sheep on your property?*

Well, we really did because we used to get eaten out with them. Sheep can come in and eat you out, and then they're gone.

*They graze differently than cattle do? Is that it?*

No, they graze just about the same, but there's a whole bunch of them, and they just move through and eat everything.

*So it's not like cattle that roam around. The sheep are located and localized, and they just keep going like a giant lawn mower, kind of like.*

Yes. There really was that hatred.

*Did this sheep trail go through your property?*

Yes, it did. It was a state-designated sheep trail.

*State designated. That meant the government got in on this. The state determined that there would be a sheep trail here?*

Yes. See, I think the trail is still there, but there's no sheep going through there any more.

*What brought about this regulation that said the state would define the sheep trails? Was that to limit the friction between the ranchers and the sheepmen?*

Yes.

*When did that happen?*

As long as I can remember.

*So even probably before your time?*

Yes.

*Did your father, in this case, like this? Did he just go along with it because he had to?*

JD: No, they had to keep the sheep moving. There was an understanding. In the daytime they were to keep the...it was a drive—a sheep drive.

*They couldn't just feed the country off.*

JD: They weren't allowed to take 10 acres on each side of the drive; they were supposed to keep their sheep more or less together and drive them.

*There was a defined area, then. How big was that defined trail, say in width, basically?*

Oh, basically it's supposed to be couple of hundred yards wide because you were supposed to keep driving them.

*Then at night, for camp, though, were there designated campsites that they could be in, or was it wherever they landed at night?*

Wherever you landed at night.

*What if they were going through the Red Rock ranch on the sheep trail and decided to camp someplace where, say, your father really didn't want them.*

JD: That wasn't the sheep trail.

*They camped right on the trail?*

Yes.

*What would happen if they abused that privilege and got off the sheep trail? Could the rancher prosecute them or get the state after them?*

Yes. You could bring lawsuit against them for damage.

*You had to go through the state system, though?*

Yes.

*Who within the state officiated that? Did you have game wardens then? Or the sheriff?*

I think we went to the sheriff.

JD: But that's what brewed the enmity between them because some, if there was good feed, they would try to go real slow on the trail and let their sheep get as much food as possible. Many times Dick and I would go out a horseback and tell them to move on and get moving.

*Were these mostly Basque herders who were driving the sheep?*

Yes, mostly Basque herders.

*Could you communicate with a lot of them?*

No, they'd say, "No sabe." That's what they'd tell you, "Me no sabe."

*So then you wouldn't go after the herder as much as you'd go after the sheep rancher—the man who'd hired the herder.*

Well, you'd have to. But if you were right up there like on the mountain where these sheep used to come in on us, why, if you leave them there a day, they could clean the whole dang thing out.

I was up there one day, and this herder—I knew him from the year before—he was in over on top of it, see. It wasn't a very big mountain. So I told him to get his sheep out of there. He said, "Me no sabe."

And I said, "I know you from last year!" I started taking my lass I rope down. He said, "Me sabe, me sabe!"

*Now, you started taking your what, you say?*

A lass' rope. It's to lass' calves with.

*Oh, lasso rope. I've never heard of that term before.*

Oh, haven't you? [laughter]

*Not run together, I haven't, no. You say Pat McCarran grazed his sheep up on Petersen Mountain.*

Well, there come this big snow, and he got caught up there.

*Where did McCarrans graze their sheep on the other side?*

They had a grazing permit over in Sierra Nevada mountains, I think.

*Can you remember any of the sheep ranchers in particular that you and your father might have had arguments with or a lawsuit against, or did it ever get that far?*

We would always have quite a few arguments with this Saralequi. Our ranges joined together, top of Petersen's. I was supposed to have the top and the east side. But I have no animosity towards her [his daughter]

*Your family didn't actually end up, then, taking anybody to court over this or anything.*

No.

*To your knowledge or from something your father might have told you, were there ever any of these sheepherders killed? Do you know of that ever happening or your father ever telling you of, say, ranchers taking off after a sheepman?*

No. I don't remember that happening around here.

*How big were the herds up in this part of the country?*

They were pretty good-size herds.

*How many head, roughly, would you say?*

I would say a thousand.

*Did you eat much sheep on the ranch?*

No.

*What did you do with your lambs?*

Well, of course, we ate some of them, but the kids don't want to give up. They [Mr. Dickinson's children] used to take them to 4-H and sell them at the fair.

*What about you when you were growing up with these bummer lambs?*

We ate them, I guess. During haying and stuff, why, they would eat them, and during the winter.

*Which high school did you go to?*

I went to McKinley Park School [and] the old Reno High; it was the only high school here.

*What kind of classes did you take? Did you take anything that would help you on the ranch?*

No, not mainly.

*Did they have any of those courses, like shop and mechanics?*

Yes, I took shop.

*Woodworking, things like that?*

Fact is, where's that chair? I made some pretty good things. I made a—what kind of a table do they call them?—a big library table, and I made that chair, and then I made a smoking stand. I consider they were a pretty good piece of work.

*I saw the chair; that was really nice. You mentioned that once you got to school you had things that you could show the other kids, the city kids—hunting and fishing, that kind of thing. Did you bring friends out to the ranch a lot, like on weekends?*

Yes.

*Who were your special friends at school? Did you have any really special people...?*

Well, this Raymond Dohr, for one. Yes, I had several. That [Malcolm] McEachin...you remember he used to be [Secretary of State] up here? And then [Ainsley] Mabson.

See, when my sister had to go to high school then I came in here and went into seventh grade. And so this boy by the name of Raymond Dohr—oh, we were always hunting and fishing together.... Ainsley Mabson, who I think is still alive, was in the school system here—principal in the school system. This [Raymond] Dohr's father was owner of the Reno Brewing Company. That was down [East] Fourth Street there; there's some electrical place in there now.

*Down near Louie's Basque Corner, somewhere in that neck of the woods?*

Yes. We talked him to taking us up to what they call Blue Lakes, south of Markleeville, [California]. There's a highway in there now, they tell me.

Yes.

But at that time you had to just about ruin an automobile to get in there. [laughter] It was one of those kind of roads.

*You didn't have 4-wheel drive back then, did you?*

No. So he took us in there and dumped us out, and so we wanted to fish right away, and we threw our stuff on the ground, and he took off. And we went running down to the lake and started fishing. So we came back in



about an hour or so, and the gate tender there had a bunch of hogs. They had found this stuff, and they just about mutilated all of it. Of course, we didn't know; we were just all kids. We practically starved to death for a while. We didn't have any communication to Reno. What we did have left, we built racks up in the trees so the hogs couldn't get it, and then the chipmunks ate most of the rest. [laughter]

*How long had you planned to be down there camping and fishing?*

About 2 weeks. The way we lived, these big mountain quail...we'd go around the lake and pick them up every morning, dead. Now, nobody could ever explain whether they couldn't fly the lake or whether they saw their reflection and thought there was other quail and lit. But, anyhow, we picked up several every morning, and that kept us alive, with what fish we caught there. Beautiful fish in there. Then the gate tender, he felt sorry for us, and he baked bread, and he gave us bread.

*What was a gate tender doing up at Blue Lakes?*

It was a [Pacific Gas and Electric Company] manmade lake.

*Do you know when the dam was put an up there?*

I'd say it was put in about 1915.

*And the gatekeeper lived up there all year long?*

Yes. So then come this big snow, and my dad called this Mr. Dohr. He said, "What about those kids up there?"

"Oh," he said, "leave them there to get their bellies full of it."

Anyhow, my dad got worried, and he came up. And boy, I'll tell you, when he drove in, we just run and jumped in the car! [laughter]

[Then there] was a different trip.

*Let's hear about that one.*

Well, this was up in Hope, Faith and Charity valleys. This was after the other trip, next year. We went up there, and the same thing happened. He took us up and dumped us out. So we caught fish and had a barrel there and salted them down—put the fish in the barrel and put salt on them and, gosh, they were beautiful fish.

*So you took some fish home, then, with you?*

Yes.

Of course, none of our folks knew we smoked, and we smoked like chimneys. [laughter] And so, finally, my dad drove in one day—Dad and Mother—and there was smoke butts laying everywhere. We had these Bull Durham sacks; we were smoking Bull Durham. This Ray Dohr, he forgot all about his Bull Durham tag, and he came out of the tent, and I was going like this [gestures to shirt pocket]. Finally, he caught on, so he went in the tent and he came out—and it's so obvious— "Oh," he says, "I guess I'll put these BB's over here." [laughter] And here are cigarette butts laying everywhere!

*Did your parents buy the BB ruse?*

No, I don't think anybody would buy that. [laughter]

*Did your parents say anything about all the cigarette evidence lying around the campsite?*



Yes, they said plenty. [laughter]

*Before or after they got you home? [laughter]*

Right then! [laughter] I was staying with my grandmother down here on Washington Street. She bought that little home and kept us kids while we were going to school. [I] used to go with this kid by the name of [Lawrence] Bernosconi, too. He used to be quite a diver; maybe you've heard of him. He used to dive off the rafters out in the old Moana hot springs. Finally, that's what happened to him: he dove off, and some guy run and dove off the low dive, and they hit, and he never got over it.

But, anyhow, my folks came in from the ranch, and they said they were going to Pyramid Lake. So this Bernosconi and this Ray Dohr came down. I was sitting in the garage there smoking. They said, "Hey, what about your folks?"

"Oh," I said, "they went to Pyramid Lake. Sit down and have one." so we hadn't any more than sat down till they drove up out in the front. The door was closed, but we beat at out the back door and went downtown! [laughter]

Of course, they surmised it, and, finally, I came back. They were talking to my sister about it; I could hear them talking. She was saying, "Well, if they're going to smoke, they're going to smoke, I guess." So at that time, they knew I was going to smoke, I guess, and there was never anymore said about it. He was against smoking very much. So, of course, just like all kids, I learned to smoke.

*What did you smoke when you learned to smoke?*

I smoked everything...from horse manure....

*Oh, I knew you were going to say that! [laughter] Fred Dressler said that, too!*

Did he?

*Yes, he did! I knew you would! [laughter] Could you boys, at that age, just go into a store and buy tobacco and things?*

Oh, yes.

*There was no age restriction?*

No. As I remember, we could. We smoked everything.

We had an old Model T Ford, and I can't remember where we got that Ford, but I think it belonged to the Dohr family. So we were going up to Soldier Meadows; you've heard of that, up in the northern part of Washoe County?

Yes.

Sage hen hunting. They had running boards then on those old cars. We had [one] of my mother's good mattresses or good quilts and everything. We'd rolled our guns up in the bed. This Ray Dohr, he was driving, and this other kid and I were sitting up front there with him. So we're going up at night because we wanted to get there early in the morning. We're smoking, of course, and he threw a cigarette out, and it went down in that bed. Finally—he had his arm out of the window—and he felt the heat on his arm. He looked down, and the bed was afire! [laughter] Well, of course, we stopped and jumped off and threw the bed out and unrolled the thing. I've got the gun case, yet, that's still charred.

*It didn't hurt the gun, though?*

No, because it was in the case.

*What happened when you had to tell about the burned bed, though? [laughter] Did you get in trouble for that?*

We got heck, yes, we did.

*Did you tell them how it happened?*

Yes! We had to tell how. [laughter]

*So did you ever quit smoking?*

Yes. I don't smoke any more. I smoked while we were married. Of course, my dad knew I smoked; yes, that was out on the ranch. I never smoked many out there because he didn't smoke. But I really liked them after I ate. But I never could work and smoke like a lot of people do. So I would maybe smoke 4 or 5 cigarettes all day long.

After all, smoking is a nervous habit. When I'd come to town and I'd maybe walk up and start talking to you—I probably would do it now if I smoked—and if I felt a little uneasy talking to you, first thing I'd do is reach for a cigarette. Well, maybe I'd smoke a whole pack or something, because I'd be around doing business and the first thing, if I'd go up and would start talking to somebody, I'd feel a little uneasy and want something for a crutch...pull out a cigarette and smoke. And I'd have a cigarette hangover when I went home at night; I'd have a headache, because I wasn't used to them.

I was going along smoking with this headache, and thought, "You dummy!" I reached in my mouth, and I threw it out of the window, and I said, "The last one of those damn things I'll smoke!" And it was. [laughter]

*Congratulations! [laughter]*

I really did like to smoke. The way I smoked on the ranch, I don't think it hurt at all. It wasn't easy.

*What, quitting?*

Yes. [laughter]

*Well, you mentioned a little bit ago that you did a lot of fishing and hunting with your friend, Ray Dohr.*

Yes.

*Was that something that you used to supplement your family's food on the ranch, or you just enjoyed doing it?*

Just enjoyed doing it.

*Did you ever do any trapping?*

Not much.

*But you did some?*

Oh, some.

*Like for bounty? What did you trap?*

No. Just trapped coyotes, mainly.

*What did you do with them, then, once you trapped them?*

I didn't used to do anything with them.

*Were they a real problem on the ranch?*

Yes, they got calves. If there gets too many, they run in packs and then they can kill calves.

*Well, I would think if they got running in packs, they'd be pretty dangerous, especially in a drought year or a lean year.*

Yes. What they do, they're bad on deer, too. Take 2 or 3 of them—especially, at least 3—why, the old doe'll try to protect her fawn, and so as they run in, why, then the other one'll run in and get the fawn. It's pretty near a cinch.

*How did you used to trap coyote?*

They're hard to trap.

*Are they?*

You bet.

*You had to be smarter than they were, right?*

Yes. [laughter] You have to have a scent and bury your trap.

*Did you use a regular steel trap?*

Yes, regular steel.

*What did you use to bury the human scent?*

Axphidia, I think they called it. Do you know what that is?

*No. Do I ask? [laughter]*

Well, it smells bad. [laughter]

*That's what I'm afraid of!*

Yes, it came in a chunk, and you made a powder out of it. After you got your trap buried, you'd sprinkle that over the trap and around the trap.

*What did you do, just bury your trap like under some leaves or under a little bit of dirt or something?*

Yes, dig a little hole. Sometimes you could bait it with a dead animal. But they're pretty smart. They smell that human, or if you touch that animal....

*That's it?*

Yes.

*Did you ever have any trouble out on the ranch—I know you've got some awfully mountainous terrain out there— did you ever see any mountain lion out there?*

I think there was a mountain lion there once, but there weren't many mountain lions.

*Nothing that bothered the livestock or anything, though?*

No. There's a lot of bobcats.

*Oh, yes? Did you ever have any problem with those?*

Well, they used to come an and get the chickens and turkeys and kill all your cats and stuff like that.

*Yes. Did you trap those at all?*

Yes, we used to trap them. They're pretty easy trapped. You just set a trap most anyplace and put the dead animal there.

JD: Their favorite food is a domestic cat.

*Really?*

JD: Yes.

*Did you trap those for bounty?*

No.

Was there bounty on those?

I don't think there was, then.

*You've shown me a picture of a bobcat that Larry brought home. Can you tell me that story?*

Well, we used to have a teacher there by the name of Mrs. Cloak. Every once in a while, she'd take the kids out on a nature study. They went over into what we call Dry Valley, and a fellow by the name of [Harry] Hubbard used to live over there. He had 2 or 3 buildings there on this ranch; they vacated the ranch because they starved out. It was a dry ranch. They went over there, [the] kids went into this old building, and they found this bunch of little cats in the upper story. Those bobcats are pretty ferocious.

*The adult ones, yes.*

And, boy, if she didn't come down there and jump on them before they got out of there with a cat. [laughter] They took a couple of them—the kittens.

*How big were the kittens? About how old?*

Oh, just a few days old. They didn't even have their eyes open. So Larry brought this one home, and I think one of the hired man's kids took the other one.

JD: He made him take it back.

So Judie used a little doll bottle and fed this cat until it grew up to be a pretty good-sized cat. But you couldn't keep it from killing chickens. My sister lived here in Reno, and she had fixed up a rigging with electricity to keep the dogs from messing up her yard. So she brought it out there, and I wet the ground all around, put the chicken on it, and then put the electricity in there, and put the chicken.... And that cat come in, and first he grabbed a hold of the chicken, and he jumped way back when he got the shock! Finally, he just run in there, and his body was just jumping, but he was still eating the chicken. [laughter]

*What was your reaction when Larry brought this kitten home?*

I didn't care. No.

*Did the kids bring many of those wild animals home a lot?*

Yes. They used to catch those little rabbits—cottontails—and they used to catch those pretty often. They used to catch them in the snow, even.

*Did they ever raise the cottontails to adulthood?*

Yes.

*I was always told, whenever I'd find a nest of those and take some home, the old-timers kept saying, "You can never raise those; they'll die on you." And they never did.*

Oh, yes, the kids raised [them].

*What finally happened to the bobcat?*

What finally happened to him, anyhow?  
I kind of forget.

JD: Oh, I don't know. The coyotes used to maul him every spring.

Yes. He finally just disappeared. But he stayed around there. Fact is, her brother-in-law came down there one time, and he was sitting in this chair in the house, and this cat jumped up on his shoulder! And he just about died! He didn't know anything about it! [laughter]

*I'll bet. How old was Larry about this time when he brought him home?*

Oh, Larry was about 10 or 11.

*You allowed the kids to have pets in the house, then?*

JD: Oh, yes. Not a lot.

Well, I wasn't too much for.... I used to let them have their dogs, but they could only come in the kitchen.

*So many farm people I know of—"No animals in the house; animals belong outside."*

JD: We did, too, mostly.

I used to be that way quite a bit. But this one particular dog used to come in the kitchen and lay down in the morning during the breakfast. But we didn't have animals in the house.

*What did they name the bobcat?*

Bobby. That's simple enough, right?  
[laughter]

*Yes. [laughter] You mentioned when you made the sheep harness that your parents had been in to Reno on an overnight visit. Was it pretty common practice when you were growing up that if your parents went to Reno, it was a 2-day trip at least?*

Yes.

*OK. How long would it take to get to Reno by horse—or by horse and wagon?*

Oh, it'd take, I'd say, about 6, 7 hours each way.

*And so when you went to Reno, you just planned on staying overnight?*

Yes.

*Where did you stay when you stayed in Reno?*

Well, we stayed there with my aunt, my mother's sister, Dooley—Clara Knox.

*Where did she live?*

Lived on 79 Keystone.

*When your parents went into town like this, was there anybody at home with you and your sister on the ranch?*

Schoolteacher, and we usually had a hired man.

*Did the hired man have his own house?*

Yes, but he ate [with the family].

*Well, let's stay with the hired men for a minute. How many hired men did you have at any one time?*

Oh, when we were haying, we used to have 12 to 15.

*Did you put any extra men on for branding or roundup?*

Yes, a few. We'd have maybe 2 or 3 extra.

*You had, though, a regular hired man on the ranch?*

Yes.

*How much did you pay him?*

We paid him about \$50 a month, I guess.

*Then he got room and board with that?*

Yes.

*Was the hired man married?*

No. Generally not. They were just drifters.

*Did you ever have any that stayed around for a long time?*

Yes, we had several that did.

*Can you remember any of their names?*

Then there was Harvey Barnes, [who was there for 37 years]

JD:[He] was there when Dick was a little boy, and I had him there helping me with Larry when he was a little boy.

He used to have a gold mine up at Gold Lake [near Graeagle, California], and in the summer he'd go up there. guess he had a couple of partners in that or something. Then

in the wintertime he come down and work for my dad.

*It seems the wintertime is a slack time around here for ranching, and summer is the hard work time.*

No, it was pretty even with us because we ran a lot of cattle out, and there was a lot of riding in the wintertime, and then a lot of hay to feed. There was plenty of work. We didn't raise enough hay just to bring everything in and feed it.

*You let your cattle more or less run all year, right?*

Some of them.

*But not up in the high country; you'd bring them down into the lower valley for the winter?*

Yes.

*Did you store hay?*

Yes. I put up the hay there. I had hay to feed them if they needed it. That's why there was so much riding, because I didn't just leave cattle run out there—survival of the fittest.

*So then in the wintertime you had to ride to check up on the herd and to make sure where they were and to make sure they were getting enough feed. If you found individual cattle that weren't getting the feed, you would bring them in?*

That's right, and feed them hay. One guy my dad got off a beer truck in San Francisco. He wanted to get away from it. Guy Von Staden.

*How did your dad find him?*



Some of these relatives....

*Oh, they told him about this man...?*

Yes. Cousins in Sacramento—Melvin Bayless. But he wasn't married. He was just a young man.

*Was their not being married a problem? Except for this fellow who'd stayed with you—that's a long time, 37 years, to stay in one place, and I assume he was a bachelor the whole time?*

Yes.

*Was there a problem, say, if not on your ranch, on other ranches with single hired men—did they drift a lot more than the married ones?*

Oh, yes, I think so.

*So this man was kind of exceptional, then.*

Yes.

*I would think, being single, he would have moved on a long time ago.*

JD: You treated them right as one of the family, and he went with a couple of the schoolteachers for a while.

[Harvey Barnes] worked for me after my dad died. Like I say, he'd been gone awhile. And those kind of men were drinkers.

*Oh, really?*

Now, this Guy Von Staden, he wasn't a drinker, but Harvey Barnes was that way. It seemed like he'd stay about so long, and he'd get dried out or something, and you just had to take him in and let him get rid of his money.

*And Reno was a good place to do that, right?*

Reno was a good place.

*Was that a general rule for most of the hired hands on these ranches, that they were alcoholics and had drinking problems?*

I think it was, yes. It seemed like after they'd get money-rich, or something, then after they'd go in maybe and stay in Reno 2 or 3 days—maybe it didn't take them that long—to get rid of it.

*Then they'd come back out to the ranch?*

Then come back out. We had another fellow that worked here—Bob Atkins.

JD: He had been married, and he had a family. He had a daughter down in Marysville. We got acquainted with him through Roy Rogers.

He used to be one of those same kind. About every so often he had to go off and get on a big binge.

*How did your father feel about this—these men drinking and things? Did they drink in town? They didn't drink on the ranch?*

No, there was no drinking on the ranch, even when I was running it.

*How about in your family when you were growing up? Did your father ever have a drink ever?*

No, my father didn't drink. He'd take a drink, yes, but for a good many years he wouldn't, I guess.

*Did you keep a bottle around to offer company, though?*

Yes.

*What kind of bottle was it? Was it wine or whiskey or bourbon?*

Bourbon.

JD: I was just thinking of the porcupine story.

*What's the porcupine story?*

Well, this fellow by the name of Harvey Barnes that worked for us for so many years, he decided that he could eat a porcupine.

JD: Yes. They were protecting them, because that was the one animal that you could kill without a gun.

*And you could survive.*

JD: Hit them over the head and survive.

So he said he'd skin it—Harvey did—if my dad'd cook it. So, I guess they have about a dozen skins. Skinned and skinned on the thing, and my dad put it in the oven, and when it got hot he went and opened the oven up, [to see] how it was doing. And so he went outside, gagging! [laughter] I guess the odor was something, too. So my mother had to take it out of the oven!

JD: But they claimed that if someone was stranded and hungry, they could kill a porcupine and roast it.

And without a gun or anything, see. That was one reason they were protected for a while, I think. But then, I don't think they are now; they did a lot of damage to trees. Fact is, they used to migrate from the Sierra Nevada

mountains and then come on Petersen, and they killed those pine trees up there.

*A lot of porkies up there, then?*

There was a lot of them. They'd come in there a certain time of the year.

JD: Well, we killed them out of the willows there between the 2 houses, when we were walking back and forth.

*When you were growing up, say, before you get to be college age and such, and when you're a young boy, was there much socializing between the ranches? You've said you didn't interact very much with kids your own age, but did your parents get together with other ranchers very much for anything?*

JD: Well, Sunday dinners and stuff.

Yes. We used to help each other. The range was an open range, and so we used to help each other quite a bit because we all got along good and tried to keep our cattle where our designated range was. But they would scatter off and then we'd have these big rides in the fall and gather up the cattle and get them back on our own designated range.

*You had your brand, and the ones had their brands or their earmarks so that you could help distinguish the cattle?*

Yes.

*But as far as just getting together to socialize, most of this that you've been telling me, was work related. You'd get together to brand or whatever. Did you ever get together just to get together? Like have another family over for dinner or go to their house?*



Oh, sure, yes.

*Was that for special occasions like birthdays, usually, or anything like that?*

Yes.

*Who were some of the families, and what would be the reasons for your get-togethers?*

Patty Doyle and [Claude] Wimple. [Roy] Harwoods— they were ranchers down close to Milford.

JD: Later he [Patty Doyle] was a realtor in town, wasn't he?

Yes.

*Is that the family the town of Doyle is named for?*

Yes. There were several brothers. One of them has...I think it's still called Doyle Motors, in Susanville. He had a home right close to Milford.

*What kinds of things would you get together for to socialize? Would it be for birthdays or weddings?*

Well, mainly it was the branding and that kind of thing.

*Did you go from ranch to ranch to do that?*

That's right.

*Did all you people run your cattle together in those days?*

No.

*You just pitched in to help each other?*

Yes. The main one I used to run my cattle with was Galeppi brothers. Their ranch was about 10 miles from mine. They lived in [Constantia], California, and our cattle used to run quite a bit together. So, we naturally rode together.

JD: Then on the east side you rode with Hi West.

Yes. And [John] Matley.

JD: They used to ride Dry Valley together and....

Well, that's with Galeppi.

JD: Yes, and Warm Springs you rode with Hi West.

Yes.

*Once you got your cattle branded and things, how did you get them to market?*

Well, I used to drive them clear to Reno. Fatten up the steers, and sold most of them at Nevada Packing Company in Reno.

*Where was the packing company? Is it still there?*

It was right on Fourth Street. Do you know where the overpass is, Fourth and Wells?

Yes.

That's where it was.

*Did the ranchers get together to drive the cattle all together, or did the Dickinson people from the Red Rock just drive their own in?*

Yes, we drove our own in.

*How many head would you drive at one time, approximately?*

Oh, I'd say a couple of hundred.

JD: We all helped. Dick's mother rode, and I rode, and him and his dad and the hired man.

We'd fatten up the steers there, mainly. Then we had what they called a wire corral, and we'd take the cattle out there the night before. Of course, they had no water, but we'd try to feed them a little hay. We'd get up about, oh, before daylight and start across where Stead is and end up in Reno, I'd say about 3:00 or 4:00.

*So it'd take you the better part of 2 days to do that?*

Yes.

*What time of the year would you do this?*

Well, that'd be along in the spring of the year. We fattened them out there, and it'd be still in the winter.

JD: March.

*When you'd drive them in?*

Yes.

*That was awful cold, wasn't it? [laughter]*

You bet. I still remember that.

*When you were a little boy, the whole family would go out and help do this? Frances, your sister, rode also and would help?*

Yes. One time I got so doggone cold, I told my dad, I said, "I'm getting awful cold." You know, the coldest time of the day is when the sun comes up.

*Oh, yes?*

It just comes up—this is in the wintertime, and it's real cold—and it drives that cold air ahead of it. That is the coldest time of the day. So he said, "Well, get off and walk." And when I got off, I couldn't walk. So he got right busy building a fire.

*You were that cold that you couldn't walk?*

I'll tell you, those were cold drives.

*You'd go to a halfway point, and then you camped out at night...around a campfire and did your cooking and stuff. You didn't have a shack or anything to stay in?*

We had a real good night's sleep, too, because we had hay on the hay wagon, and we slept in the hay, and the horses were eating off of the hay.

*So your mattress was disappearing during the night! [laughter] You carried the hay for the cattle or for the horses?*

No, you couldn't really feed the cattle.

*So, why did you have a hay wagon with you?*

For the horses.

*What route did you take in to Reno?*

We came in through Sullivan Lane.

*But before this, when you left the ranch, you came across what became the Stead military base?*

What is now Stead, and then as we came towards Reno we came in Sullivan Lane.

JD: Across Lemmon Valley.

Yes.

*Did you have any problems with rustlers on the Red Rock?*

Yes.

*Can you tell me some of those instances that you might remember or what kind of problems there were?*

Well, I think the main problem was they just come out there at night, and that's a big country, and there's roads everywhere. They'd drive around till they see an animal, and then they'd shoot it—especially after they got deep freezes where they could keep the meat.

*Then you had more problem with that?*

Yes.

JD: Yes, twice as much.

We had a lot.

*After they got deep freezes, would they take the whole animal, then?*

Yes. Mostly, they would take the best part of the animal—hind quarters.

JD: Lots of times during deer season, if they didn't get a deer or something, why, we'd find the hides of cattle.

*How many cattle a year would you lose, maybe? Let's take it before the deep freezes came in—how many head would you lose a year maybe on the Red Rock?*

Oh, I don't know exactly. You know, the way we ran cattle, we couldn't exactly tell how many we were losing, because we never had them all in at one time to count, like a lot of people did.

*Would you say you lost a greater proportion to rustling or to, say, coyotes or natural forces?*

I don't think we lost many to coyotes. Rustling... yes, rustling.

*Were there any laws to protect the ranchers against this? What recourse did you, as a rancher, have against the rustlers?*

Well, there wasn't very much. You reported it at the sheriff's office, but they just never found it—who took it or anything else.

*What would happen if a rustler were caught? What kind of penalties would the person have to pay?*

Well, they'd give them their time in the pen, yes.

*In the state pen or the county jail?*

State pen.

*Do you remember any instances, especially when you were younger or even of your father's telling you, about how the ranchers might get together to go after rustlers? Did it ever come to that level?*

Ho. It didn't come to that, not that I remember.

*Did you have any family customs when you were growing up? Anything specific that your family ever did together for holidays or anything?*

Yes.

*Did you share holidays at all, like Christmas and Easter?*

See, my mother had 2 sisters, and they lived here then at that time, and so we used to get together with them. They used to get up a bunch of presents and come to the ranch and have Christmas.

*Did you ever go into town for Christmas?*

Oh, yes. Mostly according to the weather. We used to switch off.

*Meaning according to the weather, if you could get into town, you got into town?*

Yes. But mostly, they came out there.

*What was Christmas like? Did you get a tree?*

Yes. We used to go over into [the] Sierra Nevada mountains and get our own tree.

*You didn't cut just a pinyon or something off Petersen Mountain? Are there any pinyons on Petersen?*

No. There's pine; a lot of them are dead now.

*You'd go all the way over to the Sierra Nevada?*

Because this family lived right up against Sierra Nevada mountain, and it isn't that far, really.

*Whose family was this?*

[Gene] Rolland family.

*You'd go out with them and cut the trees?*

We'd go up in the mountains and cut our trees.

*Did you take a wagon from your ranch over to their ranch so you could bring the tree back?*

Yes.

*How large a tree would you usually get?*

We used to get pretty big trees.

*What kind were they?*

JD:Douglas fir.

*Those make nice ones. Did you trim it on Christmas Eve, or did you trim it several days beforehand?*

I think we'd trim it before.

*Was it up for your birthday [17 December]?*

Yes.

*When you were growing up, what kinds of things trimmed your tree?*

I don't know; we've got some of them yet, I guess! [laughter] We made ornaments.

*Did you help make them, or was that your sister and mother usually did that?*

We did some of that in school.

*Do you remember what kinds of things you made in school? I wonder if it's the same kind of things kids make today.*

JD: You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours?

Yes! [laughter]

*What? [laughter]*

JD: He made his mother a real cute little plaque one year.

There's chicken on it and a piece of sandpaper on the side. And there's chicken scratching and says, "I scratch for food, and you scratch for light." [laughter]

*Did you have any family customs that were Danish that you know of?*

JD: Grandma made the Danish cookies by the barrelful.

Yes.

*But that was about all that you had that was Danish that you hung onto?*

JD: Well, I don't know. Plum puddings and things—puddings from the fruits that they had. Lots of apples—apple pies, apple dumplings.

*What was a typical Christmas dinner in the Dickinson house when you were growing up?*

Turkey.

*What went with it?*

Oh, usually mashed potatoes and squash, something like that.

*What kind of dessert might you have?*

JD: Fruitcake.

Yes.

JD: Grandma made a most—I still have the recipe—a wonderful Danish fruitcake.

*Do you make it yet?*

JD: I've made it up until the last few years.

*What kinds of gifts did you get? Did you store buy gifts, or did you make gifts?*

No, they were store-bought, yes.

*Did you kids have your own spending money to buy gifts for the rest of the family, or did Mom and Dad give you some money for that?*

Yes, Mom and Dad gave us money.

*When I was little we used to plan a trip to the city to go buy Christmas gifts. Did you plan a day to go into Reno as a family and then go do your Christmas shopping?*

Yes.

*Did you look forward to that? Was that an adventure for you?*

Yes, I kind of liked it.

*Where did you shop in Reno for things like that?*

Well, let's see...used to have Gray, Reid, Wright [Company].

Was that Virginia Street?

Yes. And I can't quite remember some of the other ones. But Reno wasn't very big, then.

*Was Gray, Reid mainly a clothing store then, or was it more of a department store?*

It was a department...

*Was Weinstocks in town then at all?*

No.

*Gray, Reid was one the bigger stores?*

It was the biggest.

*You had relatives up around what's now Boomtown—the Mortensens. Did you spend any Christmases with them that you remember?*

Yes, some Christmases with them.

*Did you go there, or did they come over to the Red Rock?*

They'd come over, mostly.

*Were there other Danish people, other than your family and the Mortensens?*

Let's see. Yes, there was the [Paul] Garsons.

*They lived out near Boomtown, also?*

Yes.

JD: Yes, there were quite a few in the Reno area.

*Were they dispersed all through Reno at that time, or did they live in certain areas?*

JD: No, mostly up by Verdi, I think. They went on the west side, and the Italians had the regular meadow [Truckee Meadows]. And then the Germans had Minden and Gardnerville.

*The Danes around the west side of Reno, they lived up a little bit more?*

JD: Yes, right around Verdi, all around there. Oh, there's 4 or 5 that are still around up there.

*Was their ethnicity something that drew them together?*

They're very close.

JD: They were very close—almost a family. There weren't so many of them, and so they kind of cliqued. They made a Danish clique, I'd call it.

See, they [were] practically all Danish that sold for Boomtown—there were little ranches in there.

*Did they have a Danish church up there?*

JD: No, they were all Lutheran.

*They didn't build their own church?*

JD: That I don't know, but I know they were nearly all Lutheran.

*Did they get together for any Danish holidays?*

JD: Yes, yes.

*Can you remember anything specific?*

Well, they were very close. They used to come down bowling, and they belonged to the Elks Club. Yes, they stayed together.

*Did the original families that came here mostly come from the same area in Denmark?*

JD: No, I don't think so. When they got over here, I think just like the Basque or anybody else.. if they had any selection, why, they'd move in close.

*Were they all ranchers, or did any of them become shopkeepers?*

They were all ranchers, I think.

JD: He had the store—old [Bob] Nelson. Then it was the one and only grocery store, practically, when I come here.

*Was it called Nelson's Grocery Store?*

JD: Yes. [The store was Nelson & Petersen Reno Cash Store.]

*Where was it?*

Where the Eldorado [Hotel & Casino] is.

*How long had he had that?*

JD: Well, before his folks come here.

Then one of the Mortensen brothers [Sophus] had a garage in Verdi. It was one of the boys.

*He didn't have a blacksmith shop that converted into a garage; he had an auto garage after the cars?*

An auto garage, yes.

*The Nelson store.. you mentioned earlier it stopped being there around 1938 or 1940. Did that sell out directly to the Eldorado?*

JD: No, it didn't directly to the Eldorado. I think Chet and Link [Piazzo] bought it and used it for storage first. Chet and Link were across the street.

Do you remember that?

*Yes, I remember their old store [The Sportsman] Did you do most of your shopping there at Nelson's—grocery shopping—when you went to town?*

Yes.

*I know from Mrs. Dickinson's oral history that Mr. Nelson was instrumental in getting Mr. Dickinson's family here. Is that why you shopped there, because of that association?*

Yes.

*Did he carry Danish things in his store?*

I wouldn't say. No.

*Just good, old basic Reno store?*

JD: Yes.

*You mentioned going through what is now referred to as Stead air base. You were telling me a little bit ago off the tape about Stead and how it got its name. Could you tell me that story for the tape?*

Yes. When they first started it up, it was Reno Army Air Base.



*When was that that they first started it?*

No.

JD: Between 1930 and 1940.

*Did having the airplanes flying around have any effect on the ranch or on cattle?*

Yes. But I can remember when that acreage around there was covered with sagebrush, and they had piles of sagebrush bigger than this house when they cleaned it up. They had a heck of a time burning it, too. Even then it was a real chore to clear that off for Stead. Of course, then they closed that road; they fenced it, and they put the road around—the Red Rock Road.

Really not, except when they finally turned it into a helicopter base, and then I had to get an agreement with them. They'd go on top of the mountain there and settle down because they were practicing high elevation flying, and they'd run the cattle off. At one time, cattle were a little hard to keep up there. So I had an agreement with them that they wouldn't go up there and use that for that purpose when my cattle were in there.

*You mean the road that you had been accustomed to using got changed, and the road that people go out now—the Red Rock Road—is the road that...?*

*Was that a hard agreement to get, or did they understand your position?*

Yes, it goes around the mountain.

Yes, as I remember, why, it wasn't too bad. But one time my cattle got in the air base.

*Did that make a lot of hardship for you at the ranch? Did that lengthen your travel time into town or anything?*

*Oh, really! [laughter]*

Yes, it lengthened it about 5 miles.

*Did the ranchers—like you, especially, since you were most affected by it—have anything to say about it, or was there any kind of a hearing?*

I could see them out there. The water runs off the air base, and there's green grass right along the edge. And as soon as I saw them—of course, I couldn't get in there—I went around the gate, and I told, I think, the provost marshal, I said, "If you'll open the gate and let me get in there, I'll get those cattle out." I can't remember the name of the general, but he said he'd have to ask him.

No. It was government land, and they just came in and did it. What was called the wire corral—we owned that, and that's where the hill started, see. They put up lighting there, and they paid me...I don't remember.

So then he came out, and he said, "No, we haven't got permission to let you in there.

JD: Dollar a year.

So I said, "Well, you go right back in, and you tell him," I said, "if one of his airplanes hits one of those cows and makes hamburger out of it, he'll have time to see me."

Yes, something like that.

I guess it hit the old guy kind of funny, and so he told me to come right in. [laughter] I can see him yet; he's sitting there with a big belly and all, like he owned the world, and he said,

*Did the Red Rock ranch lose any land when Stead came in?*



“So you don’t want me to make hamburger out of one of your cows?” [laughter]

I said, “No, and I don’t think I want to make hamburger out of one of your planes!” So he said, “OK,” he said. He told the [provost marshal] to go out and open the gates—they had them all locked—and let me get the cattle out. Fact is, I had [to do that] several times.

*How would the cattle get in there—just broken fences and just get through the fence like cows will?*

Yes.

*Did you and the ranch have any trouble with the servicemen who were stationed at Stead? Did they ever come over and do any damage or cut fences or run the cattle or anything?*

No. The kids out there used to come out and shoot my windmills out.

*You mean like the families—the young sons—or the military men, themselves?*

Yes. Not the military men, the families. But for a while they had this survival outfit at Stead.

*Yes. In fact, one of my uncles was one of the commanding officers of that.*

Oh, was he?

Yes.

So they used to use my country in there. And so what they’d do, I guess, is turn these kids—New York kids— out in [the] junipers, just turn them out loose in there and let them find their way back and that kind of thing.

*Did any of them ever show up at the ranch?*

Yes, a few. Then they had to be hid, see; they couldn’t be caught. So it really was quite a...maybe you know more about it than I do.

No, this is interesting.

But one time I went over there—we had this cabin over there, and I saw this smoke coming out of the cabin—it was a cold day. So I went over to the cabin, and a bunch of these trainees were in there with a fire built in my cabin trying to keep warm. [laughter]

*Well, they’re supposed to be out there to learn to survive! [laughter]*

That’s right. I think that was an awful good thing. I think it saved a lot of boys.

*Yes. They did a lot of training there for Korea and Vietnam.*

Yes. Then another time, why, we were riding over in there and this guy came down running off the hill, and he’s just like a crazy man; he was lost, see. I didn’t know...it kind of scared me at first. I didn’t know who he was. So when I found out who he was, why, we had an awful time. He thought the coyotes or something were going to eat him up before morning because it was getting dark.

*Real city boy! [laughter]*

Yes. So I said, “Well, listen. All you have to do...you see those airplanes flying around? They’re going in to Stead. That’s where Stead is!” [laughter]

*That’s where he wanted to get?*

Yes! [laughter]

*And he wasn't that smart! [laughter] How did Stead get its name? You said it was first the Reno....*

This Marian McIlravey came out for one of these divorces.

*Where was she from?*

In Boston or someplace. [Marian McIlravey was from New York.] So she married this guy by the name of Jim Stead. He was a dude ranch wrangler on one of these dude ranches. think at that time he was wrangling dudes up at Monte Cristo ranch.

*Where is the Monte Cristo?*

It was on top of the mountain right by Pyramid Lake. Fact is, just as you start up there is where Marilyn Monroe took that picture, [The] Misfits. Go right by that and then go on top of the mountain. That's just before you get to Pyramid Lake. She married Jim Stead, and she had 3 boys. Two boys took his name, and the other boy didn't. So then she kind of set him up in the cattle business, and he used to run cattle with me, and we used to ride together. This boy by the name of Crosten... well, both the boys that took his name—they became pilots—and I mean they were kind of desperate guys; they'd take chances.

*Oh, daredevils.*

Yes, daredevils.

*Were they military pilots or civilian pilots?*

I think Crosten was a military pilot because he flew the dedication at Stead. That's

the reason it got its name Stead. Crosten was killed; it was dedicated because he was killed there.

*Had you known Jim Stead before this Marian McIlravey married him?*

No, I really didn't.

*What about this thing of dude ranches and divorce ranches in Nevada. When did that start?*

Let's see. I'm trying to think when that did start. Well, anyhow, it started when they used to come out here and stay—I think it was 6 weeks—and get a divorce. They couldn't get one back in New York.

*Not in 6 weeks.*

No. It'd take more like a year or 2. So that started that. Then they started what they called dude ranches, because these women liked that it was a different life for them, that wild west stuff.

*Were there any of these dude ranches up in your end of Washoe Valley north of Reno there and around Pyramid Lake?*

Well, this ranch—Monte Cristo—was right above Pyramid. That was a dude ranch. That's where he met this Marian Stead.

*Who owned the Monte Cristo?*

That was Ike Brundle.

*Had he owned it originally and then decided to make it into a dude ranch from a working ranch?*

Yes, and then he married one of those women, too. And what did I tell the name of the other Brundle was?

*You mentioned Ike.*

But the other one [Bud], he didn't own that on top. Ike owned that, and [the brother] had a little kind of a dry ranch down there close to where the wild horse place [Palomino Valley] is now. Anyhow, I guess he must have gone up there to meet this woman and.... But it was strictly Ike's ranch. It wasn't much of a ranch, really. Just what little hay they had they bayed up with their horses...and they did have a few cattle, though, because I rode with them.

*But it had been a working ranch?*

Yes.

*Can you tell me any of the feelings that you natives had toward these divorce ranches? Was that something you even thought about or were concerned about?*

Oh, I don't think so, no.

*Got some amusement out of it, anyway, if nothing else?*

Yes.

*Do you know where any of the other divorce ranches were around Reno?*

Yes. Well, around Pyramid Lake they had a divorce ranch up there at Big Canyon.

*Now, where exactly is Big Canyon?*

Big Canyon is at the north end of Pyramid Lake, up in the mountain. And then right above Sutcliffe is a place they called Hardscrabble, and they had a dude ranch there, too.

*Did you ever know Joan and Harry Drackert?*

Yes, I did. Do they still live in Verdi?

*I don't think they live in Verdi. I think they live in Reno.*

Well, he is one of these guys that had quite a bit to do with...he could tell you a lot about dude ranches.

*They ran one of the dude ranches for a while, didn't they?*

Yes, I think....

*Was it the Donner Trail ranch, what's now the Donner Trail Dinner House?*

JD:I think so.

*As I understand it, Harry is an old rodeo rider.*

Yes.

*Do you know anything about how they got into the dude ranch business?*

JD: He married a divorcee, and they started up.

Yes. I kind of think that's what happened.

*Joan was a divorcee?*

I kind of think so.

*They also ran a trading post or something up on Pyramid Lake, didn't they?*

Yes. What's the name of those boys up there? Crosby. [Allen] Crosby had that store

and trading post [Post Trader Store] there at Pyramid Lake.

*Now, was that at Sutcliffe or Nixon?*

At Sutcliffe. They had some kind of a squatter's right there on that land, and they were able to hold that piece of land in there through a lot of legacy over the years.

*Was there much trading? Were the Indians much involved with making crafts and selling to the tourists and to the dude ranch people and things?*

A little bit, but mainly these Indians here, they didn't have much ambition. There were some Indians at Nixon that had little ranches and run cattle on the reservation. Let's see, I think [the] old Indian's name there was King, that used to run most of the cattle there, because I used to ride over there. My cattle could drift in there; it wasn't completely fenced.

JD: They used to laugh and say if they got in there on Indian land, you might as well kiss them good-bye.

*Did you ever have any problem with that—with your cattle straying over and then your not being able to get them back from the Indians?*

Well, if you could find them, you'd get them back.

*They were lost for the most part?*

Well, for the most part. But I've gone over there, and they were pretty honest up there at Nixon, because I've gone over there and picked up several cattle. And I've been notified that my cattle were in there.

*Now, you speak of the Indians at Nixon, and then were there a lot of Indians living right around Sutcliffe, too, and were they different?*

Yes, I think those around Nixon were better. They had little ranches and something to do with.

*That's interesting, because they were all on the reservation, but just had different attitudes from where they lived?*

Yes. I think it was quite different.

*Could the ones at Sutcliffe have lived in Nixon if they wanted, do you know? Or, what might have accounted for the differences in attitudes?*

Except that they had a little something to do with. They had a ranch and a few head of cattle.

*Why would they have been more set?*

There was a store there in Nixon, too.

JD: And white people run the store and kind of helped them as much as they could, too.

*Certain ones just did better than others?*

JD: Well, they didn't get the personal help, I think.

Yes. Over around Sutcliffe there wasn't any ranches in there.

JD: Just squatters.

*White squatters?*

JD: No, Indian squatters.

They just lived along, and mostly they fished. They had these fish traps, and so if you go over there fishing, they give you a boat and something you couldn't catch anything with, and when you got through.... We used to go there quite a bit and fish, when I was young. And they always had some nice fish in the trap, so you'd go home with some fish. Well, that was good, too.

*They made a little money off it and....*

Yes, and I'll tell you, those Pyramid Lake trout were the best—those natural trout. They're kind of a cutthroat; regular trout don't live there—too much salt in that water.

*You're a rancher, and there's been an ongoing problem with the water in Pyramid Lake.*

Yes.

*You weren't much affected with that directly, though, being where your ranch is, because you weren't along the Truckee. But what's your opinion of that situation of the white ranchers draining off the water from the Truckee River and the Indians having less water—the lake level going down, the natural fishery of Pyramid Lake being harmed if not destroyed? Do you have any opinion on that one way or the other?*

Well, I'm not an Indian lover. But I don't figure that we owe the Indians that much. All they ever did was take off everything that was there and then move on. They never put anything back. Of course, I've never been involved too closely with Indians, only just what I hear. But the way I can understand, that just like game or anything, they never planted anything; when they took the natural resources off, they'd move on to another area.

So I don't figure why we owe the Indians as much as a lot of people do. I used to work a few Indians, myself, and they're not an ambitious people. And so I don't know why... Well, that's just it.

*In talking of Stead, you mentioned windmills. I know in the past we've talked about how you got your water source on the ranch, and you had a reservoir right there in the meadow.*

Yes.

*Is that the only reservoir you had on the ranch?*

No, I had 3 reservoirs.

*Where were they all, besides the one in the meadow?*

Oh, one was right by the house, and one was just in above the house, and then another was down north of the house. Used to be quite a bit of water go off of Bedell Flat and in there, because it was kind of adobe and a lot of water fell in there. I had a pretty good reservoir there.

*You mentioned you had a couple of windmills. Where were your windmills?*

Well, they were over in more or less our desert range. There wasn't any water in there in the fall, and so we pumped water. Then there was good winter feed for cattle.

JD: You dug the well or had the wells dug and then put in windmills.

Yes.

*Did you have a windmill by the wire fence, as you called it?*

Yes, there was a windmill out in there.

*Did you ever have any trouble with wild horses  
destroying your water tanks?*

Yes.

*How did you solve that problem?*

JD: You didn't! [laughter]

I didn't....

*But not so you want to talk about? [laughter]*

[laughter]

JD: No.

*Speaking of wild horses, I know we've talked  
about how you would sometimes go out and  
round up range horses and break them to use  
on the ranch.*

Yes, we did that some, too.

*The problem with wild horses today, the  
government comes in and rounds them up and  
keeps them all in a pen down there in Palomino  
Valley. What are your feelings on that?*

Well, I think they ought to do away with  
them instead of just feeding them. I'm just  
like any other rancher. What are they good  
for out there on the range— eating up the  
range? How many people go out there to see  
them?

*And you don't always see them just because  
you're out there, either.*

There'll be enough out there for people to  
see without letting them take over the range.

*Are they really that damaging to the range?*

They are. A horse eats different than a cow.

*How so?*

Well, if their feed is short, he paws it and  
paws the roots out.

JD: Well, the damage they did on our  
watering troughs and things was if we didn't  
have any wind and they came in and the  
troughs were dry, then they'd turn around  
and kick at them.

They'd just paw...would paw them out.

*So when your cattle came in and there was wind,  
the troughs wouldn't hold the water, anyway.*

JD: That's right.

*So a lot of damage. But are they really  
destructive to the range?*

They're very destructive to the range.

*I've talked with Harry Callahan, and he, more  
or less, said similar things to what you did.  
He hates to see those horses penned up there  
because they start picking on each other and  
damaging each other.*

Yes, there's no sense to that kind of thing.  
Besides, it's costing the government a fortune  
to feed them.

JD: They ought to fatten them up and give  
them to the poor, I think.

*You mean for food, to have a food program?*

JD: Yes.



They could do something like that, yes. But as far as this adoption horse thing, why, two-thirds of the people that adopt those horses, they can't handle them. They're wild horses, and I think quite a few people get hurt with them and everything else.

*We've talked about water storage, and we've mentioned how you would harvest your hay—you'd put hay up and have enough on hand for winter feed. Did you have any silos on the ranch?*

No. I used to buy this cottonseed cake.

JD: You started buying that in about the twenties, didn't you?

Yes, and the fact is you could take a bunch of it in a feeder and put so much salt in it, and that would control the intake because a cow would only eat so much salt.

*What did the cottonseed cake...?*

Yes, that's protein.

*That was cheaper than trying to build a silo and do silage and that kind of thing?*

JD: Well, they'd stay out on the range with that.

I'd put those feeders out on the range, and...

JD: They had a little canopy for the top to keep the food dry. You could just leave it there, and when they'd come in for water, why, they'd eat, as Dick said, just so much because of the salt content. And we could leave them on the range easier that way.

*Did anyone around here have silos? I know down in Carson Valley, now, there are some silos.*

Not in my time up there. We didn't have anything you put in a silo...corn or something.

*Over in the Elko area, I remember reading and seeing the news accounts about how they had to airdrop hay to cattle during the winter. Did you ever have that problem around here at all, where you couldn't get out to your cattle to feed them?*

I sure did. I had cattle one time.... My cattle, there was enough of them that were fed in the wintertime...a cow knows when a big storm's coming, and they'll come home and bring some that maybe weren't fed, see. But at this time the storms came in so fast that what happened, they got in the high country trying to get home and got snowed in there. They were snowed in there about, oh, 3 weeks, I think. And I knew this deputy sheriff in here, Lee Hepfler. He'd been the service, and he learned to fly in the service. And he told me, he says, "Dick, anytime you want to go look for cattle, I've got access to air.... I don't own one, but," he said, "I'll take you up."

So, I told my dad, I said, "Well, you know, if I could just get to Reno and find out where these cattle were snowed in, why, maybe we can get them."

And so I did; I finally got into Reno, and he said, "Sure, I'll take you up." So we flew around, around and around, and so he says to me, "Dick, I don't think you got any cattle out here."

I'd never been up in an airplane before, so I said, "Well, somebody sure got awful fat, then." I said, "I think it's because we can't see them." But you would think they'd stick out like a sore thumb, everything white with about 6, 8 feet of snow. Finally, I said, "Well, when I came in up on the hills above Stead, I saw some cattle up in the high hills—they



were snowed in. Let's fly around there and see if we can see them." And so we had to fly around quite awhile, and we finally picked them up. Then we found out how to look for them. You've got to concentrate....you get to looking over too much country, and then he was flying too high.

So we started flying around, and we found a lot of cattle. And, of course, I knew the country so well, I could remember where we'd seen them. At that time they were having those air lifts—and they asked me if I wanted one out there. I told them, "Well, I won't say no, but I'm going to try to get them first." I think that a lot of it was a lot of waste.

*You do?*

Well, if a cow is snowed in, unless you hit a bale.... Well, even if you hit a bale right close to them— of course, some people told me it was good—but they'll pile right on top. How much will they eat? They'll mess it up and eat a little bit, and then they'll get it wet, too— they'll tramp around; they'll all tramp onto it. Personally, I couldn't see where it would work, unless I couldn't get them.

There was so much snow across through Stead that the County Six couldn't open it, because it snowed and then it rained on the snow and it froze, and kept doing that until it built it up. It was just like a block of ice.

*So the county road equipment couldn't get in there?*

County road couldn't do it. I hired Isbell Construction Company, and they made a road out through there.

I had a pretty good man here working for me; he was an old Texan, one of these kind of guys that would stay with you. We'd start out at daylight in the morning because the

road might close anytime. I thought we could haul hay out, and—this is another hay deal. I thought we could haul hay out to these cattle, get them down to the road and then get a big bunch and drive them in, because there was quite a few in an area. But we found out that they couldn't eat hay because they had to have water, and they'd eaten that snow for water till a lot of them had sore throats. We did lose a few cattle.

*Oh? Did you ever get any of them driven in?*

Yes. We didn't lose many. But after we got them home, some of them couldn't eat; they'd get pneumonia, see? It was from eating that snow.

*You couldn't do much for them then?*

No. We finally got on to penicillin. We saved a few with penicillin. But we didn't lose very many, no.

*Well, if a rancher did sign up for that hay drop, did that cost the rancher anything?*

I think it must have. I really couldn't tell you. See, that was out [in the] eastern part of the state.

*Was that a federal program or state program?*

Federal, I think. Well, that was another thing—how much of that hay that they dropped down there that those cattle could eat. Unless there was water close by or something.

*So they would have had the same problem in the eastern part of the state?*

Well, I would think so.

*Yes. Speaking of hay drops and things, there's a story that we don't have on the tape, yet—I think it was when your father was ill and your mother put out a red cloth or something. Could you tell me that?*

Well, that was another winter.

*Let's back up one minute. When was the winter with this cattle business?*

JD: In forty-something. Forty-something because Krestine was gone to school. I don't know if she was in here to high school or down to college, but she was in at school because Larry was at school, too. I've got the notices in the newspaper.

But there was a lot of snow. My dad was quite ill, and he'd been taking his medicine, and my sister lived in Reno, so she got pretty excited that he was out of medicine.

JD: I put out the red drape. He told me, "You won't have to be bothered with me after Thursday."

And I said, "What do you mean, bothered with you?"

"Well," he said, "I'll be out of medicine then."

So I got this red material—about 3, 4 yards of it—and I put it between the 2 clotheslines, flat. The Civil Air Patrol flew over there every day or every other day, and they flew over and saw the red flag out. So then they called his sister and asked her what could be wrong, and she told him to call the doctor. And he said, "Well, maybe he's out of medicine, then, or maybe he'd fallen and broke a hip, or something."

So we were sitting there at the evening dinner table when we saw them coming.

Yes, they were coming on snowshoes.

JD: And they brought a toboggan with them.

Up through the meadow.

JD: They took the road out to the Red Rock Canyon; they had driven out there.

*They came in the top way down?*

JD: The back, yes...the north side.

So they were all in, and I took these horses and went down to pick them up. One was Larry's horse, pretty gentle horse. And this Lee Hepfler....

JD: The same boy that flew him over.

I got him on his horse, and somehow or other I went to leading him, and the rope got under his tail—I still think he thinks to this day that that was a put-up job! He wasn't really happy; he was really tired—and bucked him off there in that snow! [laughter]

*Did the Civil Air Patrol fly over the various ranches in the wintertime just...?*

JD: Yes.

*And was this red cloth a prearranged signal?*

JD: No, it was not prearranged, but I knew that if they saw it that they would.... I had seen the plane go over several times, and I figured if I put that out, that we would get some kind of help. But I thought they would drop the medicine. I never dreamed of them coming in. I'd heard of them dropping medicine to different places. But when they called Dick's sister, and then she had them call the doctor, and he said, well, he could be out of heart

medicine, or he could have fallen and, as I said, and broken his hip. So they came out prepared to take Dick's father back with them.

*Did they have the medicine with them, too?*

Yes.

*So either way they would have covered it?*

JD: Yes.

*Well, to change gears, Mr. Dickinson.. .how did you learn ranching? Just by following your dad around and watching him and working with him?*

Yes.

*Did you know you always wanted to be a rancher?*

Not always.

*So you weren't always sure you wanted to be a rancher. What were your plans after high school? What did you think you'd want to do?*

Well, at that time, between [1919 and 1922]—I was back on the ranch then. I wasn't quite sure I wanted to still be on the ranch, because it was more lonely, and the work was harder.

*Had you liked living in Reno, going to school? Was that something that you liked because of the social life and just more people around you?*

Yes.

*It made a big contrast?*

And I liked the hunting and the fishing [with Ray Dohr]

*You say you came back to the ranch in 1922.*

JD: Well, that was after Aldabbey and them had sheep.

*Do you want to tell me about that? You've told me off the tape that a man named Alfonso Aldabbey purchased the ranch.*

Yes. The main guy was Leon Etchapar. And so they purchased the ranch, and they were going to run sheep there.

*Had your dad wanted to sell? Did they buy the whole ranch?*

Well, they came in there at first and got on us with grazing their sheep. I told you before that there was no lawsuit. But we had a lawsuit over the sheep eating off the range.

*When you say they came in there first, had they been running...?*

Yes, running sheep in that area, see, and they got over in our area. They talked my dad into selling; they thought it'd be a good place to run their sheep, I guess.

JD: Well, that's when he had the car agency, wasn't it? And he came to town and...?

Yes, that's right.

*Did they talk him into selling the whole ranch or just part of it?*

No, the whole ranch.

*He was willing to do that?*

Yes.

JD: Well, I guess he thought he'd make a change.

*What year was this, about?*

Well, let's see...around 1919.

JD: Because they went back to the ranch at 1922; they had it 3 years.

Yes.

*So did the family, then, move into town?*

Yes, the family moved in.

*Where did you live when you moved into town?*

They lived there with my grandmother—[First and Washington] , where I lived.

*You ended up getting the ranch back. How did that happen?*

Well, I don't know. They just bit off more than they could chew, mainly. Then Aldabbey went down into California and bought a bunch of ewes, and they weren't adapted to this kind of range; they were old ewes—had poor teeth. And they lost two-thirds of them—died. Then the bank wouldn't give them any more money to keep going on, and so they figured they'd get out of it.

*Did they still owe you money, and so you could just go back to the ranch? Or how did your family get the ranch back?*

Well, I don't think it's as big a problem to get a piece of property back then as it is now.

*Did they still owe you money? Is that how it was?*

That's right. They still owed us money.

*So it wasn't a case of you had to go and contend with other people who wanted to buy the ranch?*

No.

*Do you remember what your father sold the ranch to them for?*

I can't remember.

*So then in 1922, your family moved back to the ranch?*

Yes.

*Now, what had you been doing in these 3 years—1919 to 1922?*

I was going to school.

*High school?*

Yes.

*And what was Frances doing?*

JD: She went to high school and then got married.

*At this time did you want to go back to the ranch? Or were you still uncertain on whether or not you wanted to be a rancher?*

I wanted to go back.

*Why had you had doubts about being a rancher? You mentioned the loneliness and things. What other options did you think you might do for a profession?*

Well, I thought....

JD: He just thought he'd try something else, I guess. That's why he went to Los Angeles.

I went to Los Angeles and worked for my uncle.

*When was this, when you went to Los Angeles?*

This was in [1925].

*So in 1922 you moved back on the ranch, and you figured that's where you wanted to be, but you still weren't real sure?*

Yes.

JD: His folks wanted him to make up his mind what he wanted to do. They felt that the ranch was no place for.... At that time they were miles and miles from Reno, and so they wanted him to go down and be with young people more.

*Who were the relatives you went to in Los Angeles?*

That was my mother's sister, Sophie [Petersen].

*Who had she married?*

She was married to Harry Knox.

*What did you do when you went to Los Angeles? Did you live with them?*

I lived with them, and my grandmother was down there taking care of their child, Graham Earl Knox, [who was] about 6 years old.

JD: She had raised you and Frances here in town, and when they didn't need her any longer, why, she went down to the other daughter, to raise her children.

To raise especially this one come-along. [laughter] Harry was a superintendent of construction, and he figured on these big buildings.

JD: After they had the earthquake down in Los Angeles.

He figured on a lot of buildings he didn't get, because he was more or less of an estimator and figured for different companies. When he'd get a building, why, I'd go out with him, and we'd lay the building out, and I'd hold the instrument or the chain and stuff like that. Then when we'd start the building, I was a timekeeper for him; I kept all the time of the men and the material that came in. We built some pretty big buildings down there.

*Is this where you met Mrs. Dickinson?*

That's where I met Mrs. Dickinson.

*Can you tell me about that? How did you meet?*

JD: I was chumming with his cousin, Charlotte [Knox]

This Charlotte and I were very close; we used to even go out together. The fact is, she wasn't much of a [socializer], I'd say.

JD: Quiet type.

Yes, she was, and I used to take her out all the time—and her girl friends; she had quite a few girl friends. They used to kind of laugh about how I'd work all day, and then take 4 or 5 of these girls out!

Then I belonged to the Delta Sigma fraternity here, when I went to high [school].

*A high school fraternity?*

Yes. It was a national fraternity. So when I went down there, I looked the club up, and so I was in; it was a great thing for me.

*I'll bet. It gave you instant brotherhood right there.*

Yes, and they were a great bunch of boys.

*What was it about Mrs. Dickinson that impressed you? Do you remember when you first met?*

Yes....

JD: I think he liked my uniform.

I had to go into the hospital for a little while. I don't know...she was just attracted to me, walking up and down the ball.

JD: Both ways, I think.

I didn't used to think she was, because she used to have her nose in the air. [laughter]

*Oh, really? I can't believe that! [laughter] So did you meet her in the hospital, then, or had you met her before?*

I met her in the hospital....

JD: Well, and then I went with his cousin....

Yes, kind of that way. She was going at that time with my cousin, Charlotte.

*Chumming around with her.*

Yes.

*How long did you 2 know each other and kind of chum around together before you decided that maybe something else should come of all this?*

JD: About 3 months.

Yes.

*Oh! You move fast, or else you know what you want. [laughter]*

JD: Yes. [laughter] He decided to come home...come back and help his dad. He got tired of that.

Tired of that, and the way Dad talked he needed my help, and so I told her, I said, "You know, there's one thing I haven't told you." I said, "I'm not a playboy; I'm from a ranch."

*What was her reaction?*

Well, she thought she could make it all right; I think that. I think she liked me enough that she was going to come up here and try it out.



*Had you done much thinking about what kind of a woman you wanted to marry or whether you wanted her to have ranch background?*

No, I hadn't thought about it too much. I'd gone quite a bit with a university girl here from Fallon, and I liked her pretty well. But I forgot all about her! [laughter]

*Once you met Mrs. Dickinson?*

Yes!

*Did you have any expectations from the woman who would be your wife as to what her role would be once you lived on the ranch?*

No, I really hadn't thought much about that. My mother had been so adapted to it, I just never gave it much of a thought.

*What did your parents and your family think about your pending marriage, when you finally told them?*

Well, my sister didn't like the idea, but my mother and father thought it was all right.

*Why didn't your sister like the idea?*

Oh, I don't know. They didn't hit it off from the word go! [laughter] She had somebody back in Chicago that she thought'd be pretty good for me.

*Where you and Mrs. Dickinson going to live on the ranch? Were you going to live in the same house with your parents, or would there be a second house?*

We intended to build a second house, but when we got married we hadn't done that, yet, and we had to live with my parents. I moved

my grandfather's house from the lower ranch up and fixed it up, and that's where I raised my family.

*Now, when you speak of the lower ranch, where was that located compared to where you grew up?*

Well, it was about a mile and a half below [north].

*It all was run together, though?*

Well, practically all run together, yes. It'd been my grandfather Dickinson and his wife lived there—Ermina Dickinson. My dad had built this house and bought this little ranch from [Melvin] Jepson. Jepson used to be in here; he was the district attorney. And so that's where that ranch originated.

*Didn't the Jepsons also live in Verdi?*

I don't know; they might have. I think maybe they did... later on.

*But they were out at the ranch there for a while and then left that?*

Yes, and my father bought from them; he bought it for his father and mother. They lived there.

When we were just kids, my sister and I, we used to go back and forth a horseback to see her. And she used to make this—I'll never forget it—they called it seersucker. It was fruit pudding is what it was. It was kind of about like Jello.

*Do you know how she made it?*

Well, she made it out of different fruit juices [and cornstarch], and then she used



to put it in one of these...you know what they used to put milk in for the cream to raise in?

*Oh, the flat pans.*

Well, they were round...flat bottom. And she'd have that full. We'd go down there and..we really liked that, I remember. [laughter]

*Well, did you have any qualms about asking Mrs. Dickinson to give up her nursing career and go live on a ranch?*

I hadn't thought much about that. But she really didn't give it up.

*She didn't?*

No. She continued to work here until we got married. She came up here, and then she worked after we were married, too. See, we were married in the...well, the banks closed that time, and there wasn't any money around. That was in [April] 1931, and all the banks closed. There wasn't any money; you couldn't get anything. Nobody had any money to pay you for anything, and it was pretty bad.

*Did that affect the ranch a lot?*

Yes.

*Did your father have a lot of money tied up in the banks at that time?*

No, not a great lot. No. We didn't lose a lot of money in the bank.

*How did those bank failures affect ranching throughout this area?*

Well, they took over a lot of ranches, too.

*Because of mortgages?*

That's right. That's what broke them. They had too much money loaned on these ranches, and it's what broke the banks.

JD: And the price of cattle went down.

They couldn't get the money. The ranchers couldn't pay it, and so it was quite a crisis.

*Was there some reason why the ranchers were unable to pay off the loans at that particular time?*

Just hard times, I guess, and borrowed [more] money than they could afford to borrow. Banks overextended everything and gave people too much credit.

*What happened when the banks folded? Who retained ownership of the land, then?*

JD: The banks took over.

Well, it was just in a kind of an estate, like.

*But the ranchers lost the land?*

A lot of them did, yes. We didn't have a lot of money borrowed, but people who had a lot of money borrowed, they. ...

The Constantia ranch was taken over by the banks, then, see. Fact is, they sent a banker out there—this is before they closed—and they wanted to get him out of the bank, so they sent him out there to run all these ranches that were an...they called it the [Pyramid] Land and Livestock [Company]. Anyhow, the bank had taken all these ranches in the north. There was quite a bunch of them in [the] northern part of Nevada [and California], and Constantia

was one of them. So they sent this man out there by the name of [Robert C.] Turritin. He knew as much about running a ranch as I do about flying kites. It was said then that they wanted to get him out of the bank; I guess he wasn't any good in the bank, either, evidently.

I knew the banker pretty well in here. His name was Harry Kennedy. And a neighbor of ours— [Gene] Rolland—they were married to sisters. I know there was quite a fuss because this Harry Kennedy, he was the head of the First National Bank, and he didn't tell his brother-in-law that the thing was going to close. He [Rolland] had stock in the bank, besides money in the bank. So there was really hard feelings there.

*I'll bet there were. Did Rolland get hurt really badly by the closure?*

Yes, he really got hurt.

*Did he lose his property or his ranch?*

No, he didn't get hurt that bad, really.

But he did lose a lot of money?

Yes. He lost a lot of money.

*Well, we talked with Mrs. Dickinson in her oral history about a lot of the ways the ranch operated. I'd like to spend some time talking about your involvement in all those committees.*

Yes.

*You've told me you were the chairman of the first Washoe County brand inspection district.*

Yes.

*When did the brand inspection districts get established?*

Oh, [April 1956].

*They weren't here before the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] came in?*

No.

*The BLM came in at about 1935.*

JD: Yes.

Nineteen twenty-nine and 1934 were the priority years.

*What do you mean by priority years?*

Well, if you had used the property—the government land—between 1929 and 1935, when the Grazing Service was set up by this [Farrington R.] Carpenter. He was quite a smart man. I don't think there was anybody else in the country at that day that could have put that over. He held meetings all around the state, and so they set up the Taylor Grazing Act.

*So the BLM came in first, and then the Taylor Grazing Act came out of that and....*

Yes, the brand inspection came quite a little bit later.

*Was the brand inspection a result of Mr. Carpenter?*

No, I wouldn't say so. People were losing cattle, and there was no way to stop it, really. They never looked at a brand. They had these saleyards.... I think saleyards is one thing that really started brand inspection, because

people would steal these cattle and then run them through the saleyard, and nobody ever checked on a brand, and they were just going helter-skelter.

*Like a serial number on a car or something. There wasn't any way if it weren't registered to track down who owned the cattle?*

Well, it was registered. The irons were all registered, for years. But if there was no committee or anybody appointed to look at those irons, they wouldn't know whether they were my cattle...and irons aren't too easy to see.

*So the situation was that you had a brand and that was registered with the state, but there wasn't any regulation on controlling what happened after that?*

That's right. Yes. Another thing was this Dr. [Warren B.] Earl. He had a lot to do with getting the brand inspections. He was [a veterinarian] in the Department of Agriculture. He must be my age, pretty close. But he had quite a bit to do with getting brand inspection here, because people were losing a lot of cattle.

Now, we lost a lot of cattle out through that bank company out there. They had cattle that they ran through all these ranches. Well, the ones they run from Constantia could mix with ours, and they had cowboys that didn't know one cow from another. They just come in, and then they'd make a drive, and maybe they'd ship those cattle down below [to California] or to one of the other ranches; you'd never see them again.

*How does this work—brand inspection? What was the process of checking on the cattle?*

Well, they had brand inspectors. Like in the sale, they'd go to every saleyard on that day. Then there was a law that when you moved cattle, you could move them around on your own ranch, but if you moved cattle from one ranch to the other, you had to get ahold of one of these brand inspectors and have him come and check the irons, see, to see if they were your cattle.

*And so at the saleyards they'd check the brands.*

Yes.

*Say you took the cattle to the saleyard—what would you have to do to have a legal brand there and not be in trouble with the brand inspector? Would you have to have a kind of certificate or something?*

No. They'd just check it over; they'd know your iron. They'd check over and give the OK one way or the other.

*But then they'd do active checking at the sale...?*

They'd check every cow. They were supposed to, anyhow.

*You were chairman of this first Washoe County inspection board?*

Yes. The main thing that I had was the setting of it up, which was quite a little...well, you had to go to quite a few meetings and [meet the] elected brand inspectors, and it was quite a little job.

*Now, did you get approached by somebody else to do this, or were you just so concerned that you got involved?*

Well, I came into the meetings, and then [it] was as, really, an interested party that I was appointed.

*How long were the chairman of the inspection committee?*

Oh, I guess a year or 2, but I did a lot of work in it after a couple of years. [Mr. Dickinson was involved with the committee for some 10 years.]

*Was this something that was new to a lot of states, or had other states had brand inspection laws and Nevada thought it was a good idea and followed them? Was Nevada one of the first states to do this?*

No. There was quite a few other states that were doing that.

JD: Nevada had open range.

Yes, it was a little different here to check on. I think California had them before we did.

*Was Nevada one of the only states with open range?*

Well, Texas and.... I don't know for sure on that.

*Did BLM have anything to do with the brand inspection?*

No.

*That was all just the ranchers got together and...?*

Yes.

*You went through the state legislature with this and got laws and got recognized?*

Yes. It's a pretty strict thing, even now.

*Yes, you can't move anything without that brand inspection.*

No.

*You were also vice-president of the state Grazing Board.*

Yes. I think I was on that 2 years.

*Do you remember about when that was?*

No. I wish I had those certificates. I was on both boards at the same time.

*How did you get involved in the state Grazing Board?*

Of course, I was involved in it for my own use. I run on so much government land out there, and so I just about had to be in it if I'd keep up on what was going on.

*How did the Grazing Board get set up? Now, this is what Carpenter had something to do with?*

Carpenter had called these meetings, and then they had elections.

*What was the purpose behind the Grazing Act? What changes did that bring about in the way you used the land?*

Well, it really gave you some assurance of what you had. Now I think it's gotten out of hand because the fee is way too high for the use of public land.

*Was there always a fee from the very beginning?*

Yes. I think it was \$.05 a head.

*What is it now?*

A dollar something.

JD: But it was to keep people that had ranches in here, and it would feed cattle in the wintertime, and it stopped them from coming out in the spring and turning 2[00]-300 head out on the open range on your grazing.

*It was like an allotment system—you rented certain areas of land on which to graze your cattle, and no one else could do so with that land?*

You were allotted certain government land. It took a lot of meetings and a lot of fighting to get it settled, because when they thought the land was going to be dished out, everybody wanted a piece of land, whether they had used it in the priority years or not.

*Yes. But you had to use it in those priority years in order to get an allotment?*

You had the best chance for it, I'll say that. I don't say that you couldn't get it. Pretty near everybody would have a first right to it if they used it on those priority years—1929 and 1934—5 years.

*When you leased the land under the grazing act, that meant you had the right to the land, and another rancher had to move his cattle elsewhere?*

Well, he's supposed to. But it went on for years and years that people were fighting to get in.

JD: Well, and arguing over the border.

So this is one thing—you had to be elected on the Grazing Board by your neighbor ranchers...or the district. The ranchers in the district voted on you, and there was a little competition to get on the Grazing Board. They really were a good bunch of men. I mean, you'd wonder how they really could get together as good a bunch of men and as fair a bunch of men because, actually, the Grazing Board really ran the district.

*Did the board hear the disputes and things like that?*

Yes. If there'd be an argument over an area, both sides'd come in and give their side of the story, and it was up to the Grazing Board. Actually, the Bureau of Land Management was just the overseer; they kept the minutes and.... It was up to the ranchers to be on the board, and they took whatever we said—most always.

JD: For the good of the range and for the good of the ranchers.

Yes.

*Was there a lot of opposition to the grazing boards at first?*

At first, yes.

*What district were you in?*

I was in the Virginia City Grazing District.

*How large an area was that, approximately?*

Well, it took in Fallon and Carson. Yerington. When the Grazing Service first started, my dad was on [the board]. And then

they had a sheepman on the board, too, see. There was one cowman and one sheepman.

*How many men were on the board?*

Let's see...about 8, I guess, or 10.

*Did they always try to get sheep ranchers on as well as cattlemen?*

They had to have equal numbers.

*So if there were 8 people on the board, if they had 4 cattle ranchers, they had to find 4 sheep ranchers?*

Right.

*The Grazing Board is still going on, isn't it?*

That's still going on. There's men on that board that was on there with me. Fred Dressier was on there. And Hammie Kent—he's still on there, I think—from Fallon. And Fred Fulstone, Jr.

*Dr. Mary's son?*

JD: Dr. Mary's husband, first, and then son.

Freddy's on there now; he's a sheepman—Freddy, Jr.

*You were also elected to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame?*

Yes.

*When was that?*

That's about when I first got on the Grazing Board.

It says 1968 on the certificate [looking at the certificate].

JD: We were in here in '66.

Well, I was on before they sent that.

*What got you elected to that?*

Well, I think Fred Dressier had a lot to do with it.

*Did you have to be nominated, and then it went through an election process?*

Yes, you had to be nominated. He [Fred] was a big man in the Cowboy Hall of Fame.

*He had been elected to it?*

Yes.

JD: He's one of the directors now.

Yes.

*What were your qualifications for getting elected to this?*

JD: A rancher of 50 years! [laughter]

Yes. It'd been my contribution to the industry.

*I bet that was quite an honor, wasn't it?*

Yes, I thought it was.

*Because, let's see, Grace Dangberg has been elected to it, I think, because of her book on Carson Valley [Carson Valley: Historic Sketches of Nevada's First Settlement].*



JD: Old Settlemeyer up there...Fred?

Yes, he was on it.

*What does that do for you to be elected to the Cowboy Hall of Fame?*

That's just more or less of an honor, I guess.

*Did you have to go to Oklahoma City for that?*

No, I never did go. I'm going to go, though, some of these days.[laughter] My name is listed there.

JD: It's a lifetime membership.

*You were also on the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Committee?*

Yes, I was chairman of that for a number of years.

*What was that committee all about?*

The government was putting out money.... I was on the county committee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They called it the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Committee. Now, if people wanted to take some land out, they'd pay them to not go with a certain crop. It was a government program, in order to aid and keep—supposed to—keep prices, that is [to provide from having] an overproduction in something. They'd pay you not to sow a field in a certain crop that was being overproduced.

*Was that a good program? I know there's a lot of talk now that those kinds of things have done the damage to at least the Midwestern farmer.*

I think so. I think some of that was overdone, and some of it wasn't checked up on to see that it was complied right, and that thing happened quite a bit. I know I was on the committee, and we tried to check to see that people did what they were supposed to do. I was on the county committee.

*You didn't raise many crops on the Red Rock, though?*

No, but there was different things that you could do to comply.

*So it didn't involve just crops, necessarily?*

No. I participated.

JD: You had to protect the range.

Yes. But I don't think it was all that good for the ranchers, I really don't, because I think a lot of people got money that didn't really do the good.

*You think they maybe got paid for things they didn't do?*

Yes, and maybe they got paid for things that they did that didn't actually do the good to the community.

*Do you think it's a good idea for the government to come in and try to regulate crop surplus, or should farmers and ranchers just be allowed to play the open market?*

I think the open market is the best, right.

JD: Supply and demand.

Well, I understand they took a lot of land.... Actually, the planting. They were



monied men, and they'd dig out acres and acres—hundreds of acres—of some crop and get paid for it. I don't think it really did the thing that they thought it was going to do.

*Didn't help regulate the market that well?*

I don't think it did.

JD: Well, I [was] in Farm Bureau. Worked in it for many years, and we went on the version of supply and demand— let that regulate it.

*That was Farm Bureau's stand on it?*

JD: Yes.

*So Farm Bureau was against a lot of these things?*

JD: Oh, definitely.

*Well, if that's the case—because you were involved in Farm Bureau, too—didn't your being involved with this committee kind of conflict with that?*

No, it really didn't. And fact is, I didn't belong to the Farm Bureau here in Washoe County. I belonged to the California Farm Bureau; I still belong to the California Farm Bureau.

JD: But you were moderate in your thinking.

Yes. I more or less got appointed on this thing. There was a good bunch of men, I'll say that.

*Did these programs help anybody at all, that you know of?*

Yes, they helped quite a few people around here, I think.

*What kinds of farmers or ranchers would they help— the big ones or the little ones?*

Well, they helped a lot of people up north; they were pretty good-sized ranchers, too.

*So it didn't matter if you were big or small?*

No.

*If the program were used correctly, it benefited pretty much the way it was supposed to, you think?*

Yes. I used it quite a bit for distribution of water out there.

*How did that work?*

Well, like I got help [for] digging wells and things like that. So I really got help from it.

*It'd be kind of like improving the capacity of the ranch to function?*

Yes, the range and the distribution of the range. A lot of that [range] didn't have water on it, see. That's how I got help through this conservation bit—they'd help me dig a well.

*And then what would you use the well water for, specifically?*

For watering the cattle, see; especially on the winter range I didn't have much water. I put in windmills, and then I'd sometimes have to pump if the wind didn't blow.

*So it was primarily for establishing water reservoirs for the cattle, not necessarily for watering the land itself, in your case.*

No, I didn't try to water the land.

*If you wanted to put cattle on certain acreage where there was feed and you just didn't have the water, this program would help you get the wells in?*

That's right. It'd help with the watering troughs and....

JD: And it helped the game, too.

Yes, like the deer and things like that could water—and the birds.

*Did you see much of an increase in the game after you started this program?*

Yes.

*I know chukar need to be around water, and one of the things they've tried to do is create springs where they want to plant chukar in some parts of Nevada.*

Yes. The only thing is, you had to be awful careful; you drowned a lot of birds. They'd come in there, and [there'd] just be a watering trough, and they'd go to get a drink and they'd fall in there and drown, So we tried to put boards in there that floated around, so they wouldn't drown down there.

*Did that help?*

Oh, yes.

*But you'd get all kinds of birds coming in there— game birds and things?*

Oh, yes. Especially chukar.

*Did you hunt much chukar?*

Yes.

*Did you have a lot of chukar out there on the ranch?*

Not a lot, no, not like they do out in the eastern part of the state—and northern Washoe has a lot more.

*Did they plant chukar specifically on the Red Rock when they brought them in?*

Yes, they planted some out there [in 1950].

*Did they approach you and get permission from you to that?*

No, they really didn't. It's [open range].

*You also were the director of the Plumas Sierra Rural Electric Co-op.*

Yes.

*What is the Plumas Sierra Rural Electric Co-op?*

Well, the government has this co-op that furnishes electricity to farmers.

*Where does electricity come from?*

Well, some of it comes from Sierra Pacific Power, and we used to get quite a lot of government electricity, but we never got it all.

*If the government bought it from Sierra Pacific, then they would furnish it to the co-op?*

Yes.

*And the co-ops were under government regulation, or the government helped establish them?*

The government helped loan the money. But, otherwise, it's owned by the people—by the users.

*When did that start, that co-op?*

Let's see. Maybe it tells you in there [referring to a brochure about the co-op].

JD: Well, you were on it 17 years, when we'd go to the meetings.

*Here it says the first electric cooperatives were organized in the 1930s. Plumas Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative was incorporated on 9 August 1937, and the first lines were energized in September of 1938. Did the Red Rock become involved that early?*

Later on.

JD: We got our power in 1946.

*Did all your power on the Red Rock come from the co-op?*

Yes. Then we also ran a telephone line in on the co-op poles. We got permission to do that.

*Where was the co-op based?*

Over in Portola, California.

*Now, you were director of this for 17 years?*

Yes.

*Did you get elected to that?*

Got elected, and every 3 years they have an annual meeting, and you have to get elected by the group.

*Well, that's a pretty big compliment that they kept you in there 17 years.*

Yes, I guess so! [laughter]

*What did being a director of that entail? What kinds of things did you have to do?*

We really had to direct the co-op—the board did. Then we had a manager that would kind of direct us. We would have to make the decisions of where we'd get the electricity, and we had to go to these national meetings. I even went to...well, I went to Salt Lake City and back to Washington, D.C., to national convention and then Anchorage, Alaska—we had a national convention there.

*You were also on the Washoe County Board of Adjustment.*

Yes, I was appointed on that after I came to Reno.

*Oh, after you moved here into town?*

Yes.

*What did that involve?*

Well, that involved special use permits. Fact is, we were advisories to the county commissioners.

*So if someone wanted to come in and put a development somewhere, did you have to look at that?*

Yes. Unless it was something real big. Otherwise, we would go over it, and then the county commissioners could either take our judgment or not, see.

*How many were on the adjustment board?*

I think there was 5.

*And how long were you on it?*

I was on it for 17 years, I guess.

*We've talked a little bit about Farm Bureau, and you were involved in California Farm Bureau.*

Yes.

*There's Farm Bureau, and there's NFO—National Farm Organization. What's the difference? What's the philosophy behind Farm Bureau?*

Well, she can answer that one.

JD: Freedom of farming. The national [NFO]—they have a committee that tells you when to plant and how to plant. The national committee [NFO] is more like a union; you belong to it. But Farm Bureau is all freedom for you to do—what did I say a few minutes ago?—you produce according to supply and demand. Let supply and demand take care of it.

*In other words, they'll advise farmers?*

JD: Yes.

*Do they do any actual regulation?*

JD: Yes, the union [NFO] does.

*So if you're a member of Farm Bureau and Farm Bureau says it's bad to do this one particular crop, that means you don't do it?*

JD: Well, they all meet and agree on it, where the other [NFO] tells you what to do. It's more a union outfit or whatever word you'd use.

*So if you're a member of the NFO, you have to do what they say?*

JD: Yes.

*Why were you involved in California Farm Bureau instead of Nevada Farm Bureau?*

JD: Well, we were on the border, and our children were busy in 4-H. So I started at Doyle, which is located across the border from our land. However, we were able to join California Farm Bureau because our income was in California; we sold practically all of our cattle in California. I was 4-H leader first, and then the Make It Yourself With Wool and all of that. I was regional chairman first; I must have been regional chairman for 11 years or something, and then they elected me as state chairman of the California Farm Bureau—women.

*What did you have to do being state chairman?*

JD: I had to meet with every county at least once a year and pass on regulations and get their opinion on what they wanted. And then we fed that back to the men's department, too, or the ranchers or farmers. Then I attended the state meetings and....

Getting back to that Board of Adjustment, I really enjoyed that. Now, like, we had to pass on all special use permits. All of the board had

to be appointed by the county commissioners, so, practically, they took our judgment most the time—like moving houses or....

JD: Or building a garage close to the road up at Lake Tahoe and covering buildings.

Yes, we had all Incline, see, all of Washoe County. I think we went up there 3 times a month up to Incline Village.

*So you had regulation along Lake Tahoe, then, too?*

Yes. I was [also] appointed on the state police.

*Oh? Tell me about that.*

Well, I didn't really do much. [laughter] But when Ed Daily was up there—he was state police—and so he appointed me, then. Mainly was, I think, to have somebody out in that district out there. Then I was also a deputy sheriff.

*So you acted in the capacity of a law officer for that area out there?*

Yes.

*Did you ever have to make any arrests?*

No, I never made any arrests. Then I was a game warden out there, too. This game warden, George I. James, he was the head game warden. He kept after me that he wanted me to be game warden for out in that area. So I finally told him OK. It went along quite awhile, and so one day he came out there, and I said, "You know, I've been thinking about this." I said, "What do I do if some great big

Italian or something here has a deer down?" I said, "What do I do, walk up and tell him I'm going to take that deer?" [laughter]

I said, "What's he going to do with a little guy like me?"

And he said, "Pull a gun on him!"

I said, "That's just it. I wouldn't want to kill anybody for killing a deer." I said, "If I ever pull a gun out, it's sure going to be ready to go off, because you're liable to be looking down a bigger gun!" [laughter] So that was my being a game warden.

*You didn't have to go through any special training for that, necessarily?*

No. Well, I had to go a little special training for the sheriff's office.

*In methods and...?*

Yes, a little for firearms. But I never had to use it. [I] especially look[ed] for cattle rustling and things. I had a badge, see, and I would feel a darn sight safer going up to somebody with a badge on.

*Yes, a lot of people respect that; some don't.*

Yes, some don't, so you can get in a lot of trouble, too, I guess.

*But you never had to really face anybody down on anything like that?*

Well, I had to face a few. Especially around there on my own property.

*Did you ever get threatened by anybody?*

No, really not. I never really had any trouble. But I think my badge helped me.

*I'm sure it probably did.*

Yes.

*You mentioned off the tape that you got a pilot's license. How did that come about?*

Well, I bought this airplane for Larry. It was a Super Cub.

*Did he have a license at that time?*

He had a license.

*How old was he?*

He was in college, about 18.

*Where did he get his training?*

He trained at Susanville. Then he did take some lessons in here from Joe Williams.

*Did you approve of his flying lessons, or did he tell you about them?*

Well, he didn't at first. He euchred his mother into getting money and not to tell me about it, because I probably wouldn't approve. He wanted to take some of his steer money to take the lessons.

*Why wouldn't you have approved?*

Well, I don't know; I hated to see him take his money. And he was only 16 then; I figured he was pretty young. But he learned to fly in an old J-3. And we bought a J-3. We used to go out and fly for cattle, and it was a marvelous thing, it saved an awful lot of horseback riding.

*Now, did you have a landing strip right on the ranch?*

We had a landing strip and a little hangar down a mile from the ranch, because you had to get away from those mountains—a lot of downdraft. We went out flying for cattle, and we were flying around in this kind of a basin, and we couldn't get out of it—we didn't have enough power. I didn't particularly like that! [laughter]

*I'll bet you didn't. I wouldn't like that either!*  
[laughter]

So, when we got home, I said, "Larry, isn't there something with a little more power?" "Yes, yes!" I think he jobbed me. [laughter] He said a Super Cub.

*He had this all figured out, didn't he?*

So we angled around; we bought this Super Cub, which has a lot of power. Then he went away to college, and I was without a pilot! [laughter] There was a fellow by name of Harold Stoy; he was over at Hallelujah Junction; he was an old bush pilot, kind of, and he had an airplane. So he'd fly over every morning at 6:00 in the morning, and I'd meet him down at the hangar, and we'd take the plane out and shoot landings and fly around. So when Larry came home, why, we went down, [and] he said, "Dad," he says, "I think you're about ready to solo." So we went up to Susanville, and this Mary Barr, a woman—she flew for the Forest Service, and her husband ran the airport there at Susanville; Larry had trained under him—so she was there, and so she took me up, and we made some landings. She climbed out of the airplane when we landed the last time, and she said, "Well, try one yourself." [laughter]



*Were you scared?*

Well, I was pretty uneasy. She went out and hid in the weeds and watched me.

*Did you get your license?*

Yes, I got my license.

*How old were you at this time?*

How old was I, Ma?

JD: Sixty-one. You were the oldest one in Susanville to get your license, take lessons.

*Then you continued to fly for quite a while in your ranch work?*

Yes, I flew for quite a while.

*Well, did you get your fuel delivered out to the ranch or did you have a fuel storage out at the ranch for the plane?*

Yes, we brought it out in drums.

*You eventually, then, got involved in the Riverside Hotel and Casino in Reno.*

Yes, that's before I left the ranch.

*How did that come about that you started getting involved in that kind of a business venture?*

Well, my aunt had run the Riverside Hotel in 18-something—my dad's sister, Claire [Dickinson] Knox.

*How did she get to running the Riverside?*

She was [a] manager. Then the fellow by the name of Jack Sommers, he was manager there. He used to be manager in the Holiday Hotel at downtown Reno for Newt Crumley.

*That's the one that's right downtown by the post office?*

Yes. He used to come out there at the ranch and fish, and I got well-acquainted with him. So he came out one day, and this group of men—they were all self-made men, 8 of them—they had taken over the Riverside.

JD: Well, the Riverside went broke, didn't it, or something, and they were going to reopen?

Yes, they were reopening it, and Jack Streeter, he wanted to get out—or they wanted to get him out, too, the other members.

JD: He's a very forceful attorney.

I bought his share out, so I really didn't start with the 8, but I ended up with them. It didn't prove out too good. Where I had a lot of experience, it cost me a lot of money! [laughter] But I probably did better than most of them on account of selling the ranch. I was able to coup some of that loss [in taxes] that they couldn't. In other words, though, when I sold the ranch—really, it forced me to sell the ranch—I lost quite a bit of money there. But I probably got out of it just about the right time, and I had quite an experience for a rancher! [laughter]

*I'll bet. Well, that's an opposite-type business venture for a rancher to get involved in.*

Yes, that's right. There was a lot of them in the same fix I was that didn't know any more



about it. They were all self-made men, and they'd never gotten ahold of anything that didn't go. They kept saying, "Well, dig up some more money. It's got to go; everything else has gone."

Instead of, like, getting a good manager in there to run it?

JD: That's what he wanted.

I finally told them that. I said, "I don't care who you get or what you get, but," I said, "you guys don't know any more about running this thing than I do. You might be a little better businessmen, but," I said, "you don't know how to run a hotel." And [some] got to playing around with the cocktail waitresses, too. There were some real monied men there, you know. JD: They were 3 to 5. They would have these meetings and vote every time, and the 3 would vote to get a manager—the 3 would vote to spend money to do this and that to help it—and the 5 would vote against it because they figured, "Nobody's going to tell me what to do."

*Who were all the men who were involved in this? Do you remember all of them?*

Well, there was....

JD: Jack Sommers.

Well, he wasn't really involved. He was the manager. It was [Ferdie] Seavers; he was a developer up at Lake Tahoe. And then there was [Calvin E. "Red"] Swift.

JD: [He] developed out there in Carson [Valley].

Yes, but he didn't get hurt very bad. Didn't bother him, because he's a developer, too.

JD: He was a roofer.

Yes, that's the way he made his money—roofing. Then there was a fellow by the name of [Neil T.] Johnson. He was a hotel man. He got hurt the worst, I think, because he was well-fixed—I mean, moderately, and he lost practically all of his hotels down in California around Stockton. Fact is, he didn't have as much money as some of the other guys, and what he got into it for because he thought his son was going to get in there and manage the hotel. But his son wasn't any good as the manager. He didn't last hardly any time, and they got rid of him.

Then, let's see, there was...oh, his dad had big holdings down at [Vacaville, California]. [Leonard J. "Bud"] Wykoff. He's a developer up in here now. He and his wife sep[arated]. He married...she was a dealer; she's a very nice person. Anyhow, they separated over the thing. Then there was an airline pilot, Donald Hall. He owns the water company there [on Kingsbury Grade].

JD: Just as you go down to the lake, just as you go over the top. And then there was Fraser.

[Richard] Fraser was a furnace...he invented the Fraser furnace.

JD: He lost a lot, too, because he got mixed up with the girls.

He liked to come up here from California and just play around over a weekend.

*When you got into the Riverside you had to get a gaming license, right? You had to be cleared by the Gaming Control Board?*

Yes. I had to get a gaming license, and they really go through you to have a gaming license.

*What was the process like?*

They'd go through your character, and fact is, at first they came back and said that I had taken an insurance company one time. When I was sick, I tried to collect on it. When I tried to collect, they came back and sued me.

*Oh, really?*

So they claimed that was a felon[y], and you cannot have a felon[y] and get a license. But, of course, after I explained to them just what happened and how it happened... fact is, when I took the insurance policy out, they said to tell them all the places that you'd ever been. I just forgot one place or didn't think it amounted to much, and they'd found out that I had been in that hospital, and I hadn't told them that I was there. So then they brought suit against me, so I couldn't collect on that.

*That was one thing that the gaming board looked at, to possibly keep you from getting a license?*

Yes, that was a felony, see.

*Did they ask other people about you, like go to your family and...?*

Yes, they did.

JD: Oh, yes, all over town.

Yes. They looked at account books and....

*How long a process was it?*

About 2 months.

*Was it aggravating for you, or just something you sat out and waited for until they made their decision?*

Yes, just sat out. Fact is, I was really surprised when they came back and said that I'd had a felony! [laughter]

*I'll bet. You didn't even know it! [laughter]*

How they could find that out, I don't know. But that shows how they really go through you.

*Then after the Riverside closed, did they revoke the gaming license? Was it an active process, or did it expire?*

It just expired, I guess.

*How long did they give the gaming license for at that time?*

I think it was 10 years.

*What finally happened?*

Well, I got sick, and I appointed Larry as my [administrator]. He could cash and sign checks or anything else. And so he matched brains with these—there was a lot of these guys were smart guys, but they didn't know how to run casinos. Larry was just out of college, and so he matched...well, I mean, he helped run that thing just like they did. I always figured that what I lost there I got well paid for because they educated my son, and I was able to recoup on account of selling the ranch. Instead of having to pay quite as much tax, I was able to recoup a little tax on the loss that I had in the Riverside. There were some of the

other guys—they could only maybe get \$5,000 a year or something; they could only take that much. But there was quite a saving that way. So my own experience and everything, I figured that it wasn't too bad a deal.

*When did you decide to sell the ranch?*

In 1965.

*Was that a tough decision to make?*

Well, yes. I had to borrow money to run the ranch on.

JD: And your health was failing.

So...I just want to tell you this. I couldn't borrow money—my bank that I'd been doing business with and my father had and everything, they wanted to chattel all my cattle. The ranch wasn't really involved; just needed money to run it on. The way I run cattle, why, a chattel mortgage is you have to count them every once or twice a year and everything else, see. I run them out on the range winter and summer, and I didn't have an exact counting all the time.

*Yes. Before when I asked you how many head you had, you said it varied and you never knew exactly how many, and you'd lose some and....*

Right. So I went to this Security National Bank, and a fellow by the name of Jack Pryor was the manager. I told him what I needed and what condition I was in and why I needed it. He gave me \$100,000 credit to use on just as I wanted, with no security. And I'd never banked at his bank before. That's when a man has good forward judgment, see? He figured I was all right. That other bank that I'd been doing business—had money in there for

years, and my dad had had money—and they wouldn't give me...forward anything on.

*Do you think that the other bank might have had an ulterior motive in mind?*

No, I don't think so. I think they were just too conservative. There's different men that way. I even knew the head banker from going to school with him. But he wouldn't go over this local bank manager's judgment.

*That was a pretty good shot of confidence coming from Mr. Pryor to you that you could do that.*

Yes, it was. And I've never forgot it to this day.

JD: Well, he said you weren't going to move the land, anyway.

*Yes! They'd know where to find that! [laughter]*

Afterwards, why, the other bank wanted me to come back. I said, "Why should I come back?" I said, "This bank took care of me when I really needed it and the way I wanted it, and I'm going to stay with them."

What did you use the money for?

Just to run the ranch.

JD: Until we did sell it.

Yes. I had to have money to operate on, see, because I used up all my cash in the Riverside.

*From talking with Mrs. Dickinson, I know Norman Biltz became very involved in the sale of your ranch.*

Yes, he headed up the group that bought it.

*Did he approach you?*

No, there was some real estate guy—let's see, what was his name?—that took it to him. I had known Biltz, though, through my dad being president of the title company here in Reno. My uncle and aunt owned the title company. When they started securing the loans, they had to have something behind them and the ranch was up for security, so my dad became president of the company. That was Clara [and] Mike Knox—Washoe County Title Guaranty Company. When that came in, it was Washoe County Title Company, but they didn't guarantee your title until they had some security put up to guarantee them.

*When did that law change about guaranteeing of titles?*

JD: Oh, your dad was in it [before] we were married... 1925?

Yes.

*Then Biltz became involved. What did you think of Norm Biltz?*

Well, I had a lot of confidence in him, really, where there was a lot of stories about him. But he did exactly what he said he'd do with me. We didn't have to have everything written down.

*He was a man you could trust, then?*

Yes. You've heard different stories about him.

Yes.

But I can't say that. We were sitting there making the deal, and he looked over at me, and he said, "Dick," he said, "if you buy back into this, I'll get you more out of it than you got in the first place."

JD: There were 19 in it, and he said that you'd be the twentieth.

Yes.

*So did you buy back in?*

So I looked at him; I said, "OK!" [laughter]

*Did you make more than you got out of it in the first place?*

JD: They paid us cash.

No, but then we did well out of it.

JD: We would have made more out of it had Norman lived.

*What did his death have to do with your not getting more out of it? What happened?*

JD: Because he was head salesman.

With the management.

*Oh, just the management policies and the way they operated?*

Yes.

*Was it difficult for you to see the Red Rock be turned into development?*

Yes, it was difficult.

JD: That was the worst.

I don't care to go there too much, really. But, of course, there's a lot of open country there, yet.

*All of Petersen Mountain if nothing else! [laughter]*

That's right, yes! [laughter]

*That is a pretty big mountain.*

Yes.

JD: Dick always said there must be gold under there because there was nothing on top; there'd had to be something in it.

Yes, it's a big mountain. It was a good mountain, too, to run cattle on.

*That looks awfully steep to run cattle on, from the roadside of it.*

Well, actually it wasn't as steep on [the ranch] side, and there were springs all over. On the other side it was pretty dry.

*What did Krestine and Larry think about your selling the ranch? Was that difficult for them?*

No. Larry didn't want it, and I think he was kind of relieved because he felt it a duty to stay there to help me. He didn't want to leave me as long as I was on the ranch, because he knew that labor was hard to get and I was getting older.

JD: Well, he had an inventive mind; he made that loader while we were still at the ranch.

*Tell me all about that.*

JD: He took machinery first, up at Lassen High School.

Well, this loader, he said it was a lazy man's machine. All you had to do is sit in the cab and press buttons, and you could go and pick up hay in the field—baled hay—and stack it on there and then deposit it in the stack. Then you could go back and pick the stack up, tip it back on, and then you could drive around the field, and the bales from the front would drop in this trough—and he had some wire cutters there to cut the wire and roll the wire up so they wouldn't get scattered around—and then feed it off flake at a time. Just sitting in the cab.

*Is that similar to a harrow bed?*

Yes, it's similar to a harrow bed. But a harrow bed won't feed it out like that.

*The hay gets loaded on that, and it'll tip it up and put it in a stack. That's about it, right?*

Yes. That's about it. Well, he sold it to New Holland—the patent.

*Do they still make that, or...?*

Yes. Well, I think they do make that type, but I don't know about feeding it out. Of course, that would be mainly...of course, you could feed it into troughs, too.

JD: When he come in here and bought the business with....

With Carl Dawson—he was an engineer. Larry used to come in here and....

JD: Well, they knew each other for years [from] school.

He was an engineer for Sierra Machinery. He come in here for different things about hydraulics, and he got well-acquainted with this boy. So this company was losing money in the machine shop and fab shop, and so they put it up for sale.

JD: Carl asked Larry to go in with him because he couldn't handle it financially.

Yes. They bought it out. They really got along good, the boys did, but Carl wasn't as much of a driver or worker. He would rather go play golf or something. He was running the fab shop—Carl was—and Larry was running the machine shop. Well, they woke up and found out they were making money in the machine shop but losing a lot of money in the fab shop. So they really didn't fall out or anything, but Larry bought him out. I guess Carl Dawson has done real well since.

*Now, what was the name of Larry's company?*

Well, they called it Sierra Engineering. That was the part they bought out, see.

*I think that I'm about done with my questions. A lot of the ranch information Mrs. Dickinson answered, and I really don't want to repeat all of that. Do you have anything you can think of that you would like to conclude with or to add?*

Did you get the story about the kid that used to hang around in the bars up in Virginia City?

*I don't think so.*

He was a pretty tough little kid. They said that he'd be afraid to go up to the cemetery and pick up a skull and bring it down.

JD: So they planted it up there for him.

When he got up to the cemetery, why, he reached down to pick up this skull, and this guy raised up with a sheet on him, and he says, "Leave my bones rest in peace!" [laughter] So, the kid took off like a shot, and he ran outside of the cemetery gate. But he was pretty hard to best, so he run back in, grabbed the skull, and away he went. When he went by these swinging doors [on a saloon], why, he threw the skull over, "Here's your skull, and the owner's right behind it!" [laughter]

JD: That is one of Granddad's stories.

*That was something that happened up there a long time ago?*

Yes.

JD: Yes, they claimed it really happened.

*Well, I just want to say thanks a lot because I've enjoyed this tremendously.*

Well, thank you, because I'm sure we'll....

JD: I want you to know that you're not going to be a stranger around here, or we'll figure out something else.

*I'll try not to be.*



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## PHOTOGRAPHS

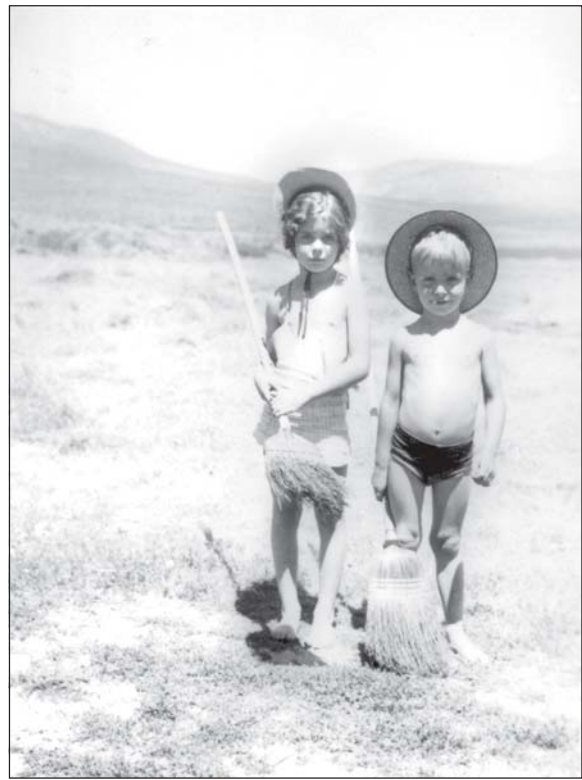


Frank Dickinson family portrait, 1905. Left to right:  
Ben, Chapman and Hattie, "Tule" Frank, Harriet, and Eastman.





Chapman and Hattie Dickinson,  
wedding day 1900, in their travel outfits.



Krestine and Larry brooming  
grasshoppers for the chickens, 1942.



Lawrence Dickinson, Roy Rogers, and Dale Evans  
after a successful Red Rock hunting trip, c. 1950.



Larry watching Grandfather O. C. Dickinson working with a buck rake, 1944.



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